



May 19, 2026

The Honorable Carol McEntee, Chair
Housing Judiciary Committee
82 Smith Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903

RE: H8385- EVICTION SEALING PROCEDURE FOR AGES BETWEEN 18-21

Dear Chairperson and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® (RIAR), we respectfully submit this testimony in opposition to H8385. RIAR represents more than 5,900 licensed real estate professionals who work every day in the listing, sale, leasing, management, and appraisal of residential and commercial real estate and who are committed to stable housing markets to make Rhode Island a better place to call home.

H8385 expands the circumstances under which eviction records must be sealed, in many cases requiring automatic sealing after the appeal period expires. It mandates sealing when a tenant prevails, as well as in cases involving defective complaints or lack of jurisdiction and excludes certain cases from the existing five-year limitation. The bill also requires automatic sealing for minors and certain non-lease-signing individuals ages 18–21, while broadly extending eligibility beyond current discretionary standards.

Mandates Broad Sealing Without Judicial Discretion

H8385 replaces a balanced, case-by-case framework with sweeping mandatory requirements.

- Compels courts to seal records across multiple categories regardless of context.
- Eliminates meaningful judicial discretion in evaluating individual circumstances.
- Expands eligibility without requiring a nuanced assessment of case outcomes.

Reducing transparency may unintentionally increase risk for property owners and other tenants.

Undermines Transparency in Housing Decisions

Reliable access to court records is essential for informed leasing and risk management.

- Restricts visibility into prior tenancy outcomes and court proceedings.
- Obscures relevant behavioral patterns tied to lease compliance.
- Curtails access to information traditionally available in public records.

Reduced transparency may increase uncertainty and risk across the rental market.

Creates Ambiguity Around Non-Lease Occupants

RIAR recognizes the importance of protecting minors from long-term harm associated with eviction records and does not oppose narrowly tailored measures to address that concern. However, as drafted, H8385 combines this policy with broader mandatory sealing provisions that raise separate concerns regarding clarity and implementation.

- Applies to individuals aged 18–21 with a “familiar” relationship” to a tenant.
- Lacks objective criteria for determining eligibility.
- Complicates administration for courts and interpretation for housing providers.

Commented [MS1]: Even though it's likely a typo, the legislation refers to a “familiar” relationship. You could say, “familiar” [sic].

This ambiguity may complicate both court administration and housing provider interpretation.

Erodes Existing Limits on Sealing Frequency

Current law limits sealing requests to one every five years to preserve balance between relief and accountability.

- Excludes multiple categories of cases from counting toward this limit.
- Effectively allows repeated sealing requests within shorter timeframes.
- Undermines the policy rationale behind the existing restriction.

These changes risk undermining the consistency and integrity of the current framework.

May Introduce Unintended Market Impacts

Changes to record availability can have broader ripple effects across the rental housing system.

- Heightens uncertainty in tenant screening and underwriting decisions.
- Encourages more conservative leasing practices to offset unknown risk.
- May constrain housing access as providers adapt to reduced information.

A stable rental market depends on both fairness and access to reliable information.


Conclusion

RIAR supports thoughtful policies that balance tenant protections with housing stability and transparency. However, H8385, as written, expands mandatory sealing too broadly, introduces ambiguity, and reduces access to information that is essential for responsible housing decisions.

For these reasons, the Rhode Island Association of REALTORS® respectfully urges the Committee to oppose H8385 in its current form.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,



Trevor J. Chasse
Director, Government Affairs
Rhode Island Association of REALTORS®