

Kingston, Rhode Island

March 4, 2026

House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing
Rhode Island General Assembly
HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov

Re: Opposition to H8000

Dear Members of the House Committee on Municipal Government and Housing:

I write in opposition to House Bill H8000, which would add Section 34-37.1-7 to the Homeless Bill of Rights governing the removal of encampments from public property. While I support protecting unhoused residents, this bill is insufficient and premature for the following reasons.

1. No Evictions Without Addressing Housing for Extremely Low-Income People

H8000 provides a 15-day notice requirement before encampment removals, but notice alone does not help if there is nowhere to go. Extremely low-income individuals — those at or below 30% of Area Median Income — have virtually no viable housing options in Rhode Island today. Authorizing removal of encampments from public property without first ensuring safe alternative shelter is available to this population exacerbates suffering rather than addressing it. The bill should be conditioned on **demonstrated availability** of accessible, low-barrier shelter or housing for those displaced.

2. The State Has No Viable Housing Plan

Rhode Island's Housing 2030 plan is completely inadequate. At its current pace, credible estimates suggest the plan would take **approximately 250 years** to close the affordable housing gap for those at the lowest income levels. Before authorizing encampment removals, the state must produce a realistic, fully funded, and time-bound plan to house extremely low-income residents.

3. The Providence Police Ignores the Homeless Bill of Rights

The existing Homeless Bill of Rights (R.I. Gen. Laws § 34-37.1) already protects unhoused individuals from unlawful harassment and seizure of belongings. The Providence Police Department **routinely disregards** these protections in practice, conducting sweeps and destroying personal property in flagrant violation of the law. Legalizing encampment removal procedures in a law that is already unenforced will not protect anyone. The Committee should ensure compliance with existing provisions before expanding the statute.

Conclusion

I urge the Committee to table H8000 until: (1) adequate housing for extremely low-income residents is available, (2) a credible housing plan for this population is in place, and (3)

compliance with the existing Homeless Bill of Rights is enforced. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. P. Nightingale". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "M" and a stylized "P".

Peter Nightingale
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