

Testimony in Support of Tenant Rights Bills:

7658, 8021, 7034, 7762, 7130, 7758, 7764, 7765, 7766, 8108, 8109, 8111, 8113, 8141

HouseMunicipalGovernmentandHousing@rilegislature.gov

Submitted by: Dr. Molly Richard, Assistant Professor of Public Health, University of Rhode Island

Dear Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

My name is Dr. Molly Richard. I am an Assistant Professor of Public Health at the University of Rhode Island, where my research focuses on the causes, consequences, and prevention of homelessness and housing insecurity. I am writing in support of the slate of tenant protection and housing bills before the Committee, including HB 7658, 8021, 7034, 7762, 7130, 7758, 7764, 7765, 7766, 8108, 8109, 8111, 8113, and 8141.

From a public health perspective, stable housing is one of the most important foundations of health and well-being. Housing instability—including unsafe conditions, discrimination, lack of transparency, or the threat of displacement—is associated with increased stress, poorer mental health, and higher rates of hospitalization among both adults and children. When families lack basic protections in their housing, the consequences extend beyond individual households and affect the health of entire communities. The bills before you address these risks in concrete and complementary ways.

Several bills strengthen **health and safety protections within housing itself**. For example, HB 7658 ensures that tenants are directly notified of housing code violations, improving transparency and enabling residents to protect themselves from unsafe conditions. HB 7758 clarifies landlord and tenant responsibilities related to bed bug inspection and treatment, which is critical for preventing ongoing exposure to unhealthy living environments. HB 8021 promotes inclusive and accessible design in new housing construction, helping ensure that homes are usable for people across the lifespan and reducing injury risk and displacement for individuals with mobility limitations.

Other bills address **barriers to accessing and maintaining housing**. HB 7034 and HB 7762 reduce discriminatory screening practices by limiting the use of incarceration history and credit reports in rental decisions—factors that often disproportionately exclude individuals who are otherwise able to sustain housing. HB 7130 allows tenants to pay security deposits over time, reducing a common upfront financial barrier to securing housing.

A number of bills focus on **housing stability and displacement prevention**. HB 7765 increases notice periods for rent increases and lease terminations, giving tenants more time to plan and avoid crisis situations. HB 8108 limits excessive rent increases while allowing reasonable adjustments for documented costs, helping to reduce sudden displacement driven by sharp rent hikes. HB 8109 establishes just cause eviction protections, ensuring that tenants are not removed without a legitimate reason.

Additional bills **improve fairness and transparency** in the rental market and legal system. HB 7764 addresses algorithmic rent-setting practices that can drive up housing costs in ways that are opaque to tenants. HB 7766 and HB 8111 expand the ability to seal eviction records, reducing long-term barriers to housing access. HB 8113 requires interest to be paid on security deposits, promoting fairness in landlord-tenant financial relationships. HB 8141 establishes a right to legal representation in eviction proceedings, which is strongly associated with improved housing outcomes and reduced eviction rates.

Together, these policies reflect a comprehensive approach to **housing as a social determinant of health**—addressing not only housing conditions, but also access, stability, and equity. Discrimination in housing continues to shape who has access to safe neighborhoods, stable housing, and economic opportunity. At the same time, inadequate housing conditions contribute to asthma, injury risk, and other preventable health problems. Establishing clear standards, improving transparency, and strengthening tenant protections are not only matters of legal fairness, but also essential public health interventions.

When people have stable, safe housing, they are better able to maintain employment, support their families, and engage with health care and education systems. Strong tenant protections help create the conditions that allow individuals and families across Rhode Island to remain housed and thrive.

I urge you to support this slate of tenant protection and housing bills. Together, they represent an important step toward strengthening housing stability and public health in Rhode Island.

Thank you,
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