



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: AMEND

TESTIMONY ON 26-H 8036, AN ACT RELATING TO TOWNS AND CITIES -- RESTORING OPTIONS IN OCCUPANCY MODELS (ROOM) ACT March 31, 2026

The ACLU of Rhode Island has no position on this bill generally, which, as the explanation summarizes it, “[e]xpands access to inherently affordable housing by re-legalizing co-living/single-room occupancy (SRO) and shared dwelling models of many types.” However, we do wish to urge the adoption of one simple but important clarifying amendment.

SRO living arrangements can be an important housing option for many types and groups of people, hence the bill. One of those groups that could benefit would be college and university students. Yet we know that there are some municipalities in the state that – unfortunately, in our view – are openly hostile to the presence of students living outside the dormitory setting in their community. We are concerned that, as written, this legislation does not ensure that this group will be able to benefit from this housing option. Instead, it could allow municipalities to take steps to exclude them from the bill’s benefits.

Section 45-24.8-3 of the bill, entitled “Co-living allowed by right,” contains a list of factors that municipalities may not use to limit who can occupy these living facilities. It includes age, occupation, and familial status, among others. [Page 4, lines 19-28] But it does not include student status, and that lack of inclusion could, we believe, be used to render this housing opportunity useless for Rhode Islanders matriculating at one of the state’s colleges or universities.

Because we believe that discrimination against students in housing based solely on their educational status is inappropriate, we urge an amendment to the bill to include them in the category of people who cannot be exempted, or discriminated against, by municipalities from these living arrangements.

Thank you for considering our views.

