

I oppose H8363

Dear Committee clerk Huntley,

This Bill walks a fine line with fair housing laws and will open the doors for a lawsuit

I would like to express my opposition to the proposed student licensing requirement, particularly due to the unintended legal and practical consequences it may create.

At first glance, regulating “student housing” may seem reasonable. However, in practice, there is no reliable or consistent way for a housing provider to determine whether an applicant is truly a student. There is no standardized verification system, and individuals are not required to disclose educational status during the rental application process.

As a result, this policy will not be applied based on objective criteria—it will be applied based on assumptions.

When landlords are placed in a position where they face additional fees, restrictions, or penalties tied to renting to “students,” they will naturally seek to mitigate that risk. Without a clear way to verify student status, that risk avoidance will shift toward avoiding applicants who appear to be students.

In reality, that means younger individuals.

Two young professionals applying as roommates, recent graduates, or individuals early in their careers may be denied housing—not because of their qualifications, but because they are perceived to fit a profile that carries regulatory risk.

This creates a serious concern under fair housing principles. While “students” are not a protected class, age and familial status is protected under Rhode Island law. A policy that results in landlords disproportionately denying younger applicants and roommate scenarios—even unintentionally—can create a disparate impact on a protected class.

Additionally, this type of regulation encourages subjective decision-making. Housing providers will be forced to rely on appearance, assumptions, or incomplete information to protect themselves from liability. That is not a sound or equitable framework for housing access.

If the goal is to address issues such as overcrowding, noise, or property maintenance, those concerns can and should be addressed through behavior-based enforcement that applies equally to all residents—regardless of age, household type, or student status.

For example, Providence has proposed an annual fee of \$500, BCI check, social security number, etc to obtain a license to rent to students. Including graduate students. Renting without a license will incur a penalty of \$500 per day. Licenses may be revoked by the city for noncompliance.

We should be cautious about implementing policies that sound targeted, but in practice create broad and unintended barriers to housing access.

Rhode Island has worked hard to grow and create opportunity. We should not adopt measures that introduce legal risk, reduce housing options, and disproportionately impact certain groups of residents.

Sincerely,

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