

Joseph Lotito

Lebanon, New Jersey 08833

Jglotito@live.com

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Members of the House Municipal Government and Housing Committee

Rhode Island General Assembly

82 Smith Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

Submitted via email: housemunicipalgovernmentandhousing@rilegislature.gov

RE: Opposition to Proposed Bill H8363 — Mandatory Licensing Requirement for Student Housing Landlords

Dear Members of the Committee:

I am writing as a parent and taxpayer to respectfully but firmly oppose House Bill H8363, which would impose a mandatory licensing requirement on landlords who provide off-campus student housing in Rhode Island. My name is Joseph Lotito, and I reside in Lebanon, New Jersey. My daughter, Dana Lotito, is completing her sophomore year at Providence College — an institution located in the very neighborhoods most directly affected by this legislation. Dana has already executed a lease with a Providence housing provider for the 2027–2028 academic year, which will be her first year of off-campus residency following a planned semester of study abroad. This bill would directly affect the affordability and stability of housing arrangements she and our family have already committed to in good faith.

I want to address a misconception that appears to underlie this legislation: the notion that families of college students are uniformly affluent and can readily absorb new regulatory costs. That is simply not true. For many families — including ours — off-campus housing is not a lifestyle preference but a financial necessity. On-campus dormitory housing at Providence College is considerably more expensive than comparable off-campus alternatives, requires students to vacate during all academic breaks and holidays regardless of circumstances, and is unavailable during summer months. A student who has secured an internship, taken a part-time job, enrolled in summer coursework, or simply chosen to remain in the city and develop the practical independence that precedes adult life should not be priced out of that opportunity by legislation that adds cost without demonstrably adding value.

The economic consequence of H8363 is not difficult to trace. Landlords subject to new licensing fees, administrative compliance costs, and the risk of punitive fines will, entirely predictably, pass those costs on to their tenants. Students do not negotiate from positions of strength in competitive rental markets; they absorb what is placed in front of them or they go without. A fee that appears modest on paper compounds quickly when layered on top of existing rent levels, tuition obligations, and the general cost of living in Providence — a city that has itself acknowledged a serious housing affordability crisis. Legislation that accelerates that crisis for one of the city's most financially vulnerable renter populations deserves rigorous scrutiny before any vote is cast.

There is also a housing supply dimension that warrants the Committee's attention. Rhode Island has worked actively in recent legislative sessions to expand housing supply and reduce regulatory barriers to residential development. H8363 runs counter to that effort. Smaller, independent landlords who provide off-campus student housing — and who in many cases maintain their properties conscientiously and responsibly — may reasonably conclude that the administrative burden and financial exposure introduced by a licensing regime is not worth continuing. When those landlords exit the market, the housing units they provided do not disappear; they are converted, sold, or redirected to other uses. The students who depended on them are left with fewer options, higher prices, and no meaningful improvement in housing quality or tenant protection.

I am not opposed to accountability in the student rental market. Where landlords are genuinely negligent — where properties are unsafe, code violations go unaddressed, or tenants are treated unfairly — enforcement mechanisms already exist and should be used. The answer to isolated bad actors is targeted enforcement, not a blanket licensing mandate that imposes uniform costs on responsible and irresponsible landlords alike while ultimately passing the bill to students and their families.

I respectfully ask this Committee to oppose H8363. My daughter made her housing decision based on the affordability and accessibility of the off-campus market as it exists today. She and thousands of students like her at Providence College, Brown University, Johnson & Wales, RISD, and institutions across this state deserve a housing environment that remains stable, competitive, and within financial reach. I urge you to protect that environment rather than erode it.

Thank you for your time and for your careful consideration of this testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Lotito

Lebanon, New Jersey 08833

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Parent of Dana Lotito, Providence College Class of 2028