

To the Honorable Members of the Rhode Island Senate Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Calvin Kirk, and I am an outreach lead and finance coordinator for the organization Housing Opportunities for People Everywhere, or HOPE. Today, I would like to submit written testimony in strong support of the bill S0212, which seeks to implement Just Cause eviction across Rhode Island.

As a volunteer outreach worker in Pawtucket for the past 4 years, I have seen an incredible rise in unsheltered homelessness in the last 6 months. Friends and neighbors shared stories of high rent increases and inhumane living conditions. Without clear eviction guidelines, tenants are scared to raise concerns for fear of retaliation and eviction. This fear creates undue stress and anxiety for hardworking Rhode Islanders.

The current protections for tenants are not sufficient to prevent homelessness among Rhode Islanders, and Just Cause eviction must be implemented.

At a speaker event about legal rights for the homeless and housing insecure, Jennifer Wood at the Rhode Island Center for Justice shared that fewer than five percent of tenants in danger of eviction are typically represented by attorneys, compared to 95% of landlords in the same legal battles. The right to a lawyer in a civil case is not guaranteed, creating a power imbalance between landlords and tenants.

I strongly urge you to support this bill to help prevent homelessness before it occurs. Thank you for your time.

Best,
Calvin Kirk