



March 18, 2025

The Honorable Robert E. Craven, Sr.
Chair, House Judiciary
Rhode Island State House
82 Smith Street, Providence RI 02903

Re: House Bill 5264 – *An Act Relating to Property – Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (4% Rent Increases)*

Dear Chair Craven and Members of the Committee:

The mission of the Housing Network of Rhode Island (HNRI) is to increase the supply of safe, healthy, and affordable homes in thriving communities. On behalf of HNRI and our membership of 18 nonprofit affordable housing developers who own and operate more than 7,000 rental homes for low- and moderate-income Rhode Islanders, I write to respectfully offer comments regarding H-5264, which proposes limiting rent increases to no more than 4% annually, with oversight and enforcement by the Secretary of Housing, and provisions for a tenant to bring civil action for damages incurred by violations.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition recently published its annual [Gap Report](#), which highlights the disparity between the need for and availability of rental homes available and affordable to extremely low-income households across the U.S. The numbers showed that the situation in Rhode Island is worsening, with a 36% decrease between 2024 and 2025 in the number of homes available and affordable to the poorest Rhode Islanders – 61% of whom are older adults or disabled. We understand the intent behind H-5264 and appreciate the bill's sponsors for their attention to the issue of housing affordability.

We are further pleased to see that the legislation acknowledges and makes exception for properties subject to reduced rents as part of a federal, state or local subsidy or program (§ 34-18-62.(e)(2)). Rent increases are already very limited in these properties and it is important that the long term financial viability of these properties is not further hampered. We would like to suggest to the bill's sponsors that they consider explore expanding this exemption to include private landlords who have kept their properties more affordable by choice as well.

In addition to the exemptions in (§ 34-18-62 (e)(1) and (2)), the legislation enables exemptions to be granted by the Secretary of Housing but does not specify the process for requesting an exemption, nor does it assign a timeframe to the criteria in (i), (ii), which may be useful in assessing compliance with the proposed provisions. We would like to suggest that the bill be amended to provide more specificity in this area to ensure transparency and expediency.

In the course of our review of H-5264, a number of other important questions (highlighted below) related to execution remained unanswered and we would respectfully suggest that further consideration be given to clarification.

- Subsection (g) states that the tenant is “entitled to recovery if the tenant commences an action....within one year after the tenant knew or should have known the landlord terminated the tenancy in violation of this section.” How would the one-year period between the time the tenant becomes aware there has been a violation be evaluated?
- There are limitations placed on new rental rates under certain tenant transitions but it is unclear how those would be monitored for compliance. How would the new tenant know what the rent was of a prior tenant, to be able to evaluate if their rental rate was within the allowed parameters? Is any entity charged with oversight of monitoring?
- The legislation would impact thousands of rental units across Rhode Island. How will the Secretary of Housing be adequately resourced to properly enforce the provisions of the legislation? This is not addressed within the bill.

Thank you to the honorable members of the Committee for consideration of my comments. As always, I am happy to work with the bill sponsors on clarifying language or to answer any questions and can be reached at 401-721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melina Lodge". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melina Lodge, Executive Director