



March 18, 2025

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

Re: In Opposition of H-5677 and 5919

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. We have a membership of 18 nonprofit affordable housing developers who own and operate more than 7,000 long-term rental and homeownership units for low and moderate income households. We are also the backbone organization for Homes RI, a coalition of 80+ organizations working together in support of our mission to increase affordable housing supply.

I write today in opposition of H-5677 and H-5919, two proposed bills that are concerning in relation to the potential for abuse and the erosion of protections for vulnerable Rhode Islanders who are seeking safe and affordable housing. H-5677 proposes to allow tenants to pre-pay last months' rent, and for landlords to charge up to two months' rent as part of a security deposit. H-5919 creates a definition for "squatter" and allows the property owner to utilize police assistance to remove an individual from the premises outside of the court-based eviction process.

The increase in housing costs in Rhode Island are well-documented. Over the past five years, rents have increased by about 20% across the Providence Metro area, with average two-bedroom housing costs (including utilities) exceeding \$2,000 a month. Rhode Islander's incomes are not keeping pace, and economic pressures such as inflation and declining federal support for social safety net programs mean that people are financially strained in ways that parallel the Great Recession. Allowing landlords to essentially request or require up to four months' rent upfront is unreasonable and will further hamper the ability of hardworking Rhode Islanders, older adults, families, and people with disabilities, among others, to secure a place to live. We encourage the Committee to oppose H-5677. There are more appropriate policy tools, such as landlord mitigation funds and home repair resources that can be applied to support property owners with repairs to rental units they may need to make when a tenant vacates, rather than burdening Rhode Islanders with additional hurdles to access housing.

H-5919 if enacted would set a dangerous precedent that would empower landlords to bypass the legal, court-based eviction process in order to remove an individual that is "a person occupying a dwelling unit or other structure who is not a party to a rental agreement". The definition of "squatter" within the bill is broad, and our concern is that it could be inappropriately applied to legal tenants, guests, or visitors. It also rather blatantly seems directed towards individuals who

are unhoused and opens the door for discrimination and criminalization of people who are already pushed to the margins. We are concerned about the penalties tied to the activity of “squatting” as well as the ability of property owners to seek intervention by local police, who will then be put in a position as to deciding whether the individual is a tenant or not, with only the word of the property owner likely to prevail.

The General Assembly has made significant strides to advance housing affordability and accessibility in Rhode Island under both House and Senate leadership. We applaud the efforts of State leaders to move in this direction, and it is our position that both of these bills are in opposition of the State’s housing goals. For the reasons above, we respectfully urge the Committee to oppose these bills. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I can be reached at (401) 721-5680 ext. 104 or mlodge@housingnetworkri.org for any questions.

Respectfully,

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

Melina Lodge, Executive Director