



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

ONE UNION STATION
PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02903
401/351-9400 • 401/351-1758 (FAX)

Testimony Re: House Bill 5257 Regarding Fair Housing Practices
House Committee on Municipal Government & Housing
February 11, 2021
Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 5257. This bill would prohibit discrimination in housing based on a person's lawful source of income, such as Veteran's benefits, Social Security, child support, or a Section 8 (Housing Choice) voucher or other type of rental assistance.

Every year in the *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, we report data on the cost of housing and the number of children who experience homelessness. In 2019, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island (including utilities) was \$1,651 per month. A worker would have to earn \$31.75 an hour and work 40 hours a week year-round to afford this rent without a cost burden. This hourly wage is almost three times the state's current minimum wage of \$11.50 per hour.

In 2019, 279 families with 603 children from across the state stayed at emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing programs. As of October 30, 2019, there were an additional 88 families on the state's wait list awaiting shelter. And these numbers have only grown since the pandemic hit and many families lost their jobs and their homes.

Affordable housing and rental vouchers can help low-income families afford the high cost of housing. However, there are not enough rental vouchers to meet the need. When a family waits the 5 to 8 years it normally takes to receive a Housing Choice Voucher or is fortunate enough to qualify for State Rental Assistance funded through the real estate transfer tax increase that the General Assembly passed in 2014, they should not face additional barriers to housing due to discrimination, yet we know they do. Families are being turned away from dozens of units before they find a landlord who will rent to them with a voucher; and some families simply give up and return their voucher. This discrimination should not be allowed to occur.

We ask you to support this bill and join 15 other states (including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont), Washington, DC, and 99 counties and municipalities that have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on source of income. Most recently, our capital City of Providence enacted a local ordinance that will protect residents with a lawful source of income when looking to rent an apartment.

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to thank Representatives Williams, Knight, Morales, Biah, Giraldo, Speakman, Henries, Potter, Barros, and Batista for sponsoring this important bill. We urge you to support this legislation.