



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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Testimony Re: House Bill 5309 Re: Residential Landlord and Tenant Act – Eviction and Foreclosure Moratorium

House Judiciary Committee

March 31, 2021

Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Mr. 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 5309. This act would impose a moratorium on non-essential evictions and mortgage foreclosures during a state of emergency declared by the governor relating to residential property and would establish an eviction diversion program to resolve landlord-tenant eviction disputes.

This legislation only prohibits non-essential evictions. Landlords could still evict tenants who are participating in criminal activity that poses a threat to the health and safety of other residents, the landlord, or the general public or whose lease violations pose a threat to health and safety. This bill would protect both landlords and tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic and during future states of emergency, whether the emergency is a natural disaster, pandemic, or other crisis.

Why Is this legislation needed?

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Moratorium on evictions protects only a subset of households from being evicted, tenants who are being evicted for nonpayment, and not those who are being evicted for other reasons, such as tenants with month-to-month leases. The CDC Moratorium was recently extended to June 30, 2021, but it does not provide adequate protections to renters who are being evicted for reasons other than nonpayment, and the eviction moratorium has been extended twice with only days remaining, leaving renters in a state of uncertainty leading up to a looming deadline.

Eviction moratoriums during public health emergencies, like the one we are currently experiencing, keep families and individuals safely housed and prevent them from having to move into crowded shelters, from doubling up with friends or families, or from being forced to live outdoors – all circumstances that would put them (and others) at risk during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Thank you to Representatives Diaz, Slater, Perez, Giraldo, Felix, Fellela, Tobon, Kazarian, and Batista for sponsoring this bill and thank you to this Committee for acting with urgency on housing issues that affect so many Rhode Islanders, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when so many families are facing unemployment, reduced wages, and the fear of losing their homes.

We urge you to support this bill which will protect our families and our communities from harm during the current COVID-19 pandemic and future public health crises.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.