



CITY OF PROVIDENCE

Jorge O. Elorza, Mayor

January 23, 2019

Chairman Craven
House Committee on Judiciary
Room 205 - State House
Providence, Rhode Island, 02903

Re: H5075 -- Residential Landlord and Tenant Act (Support)

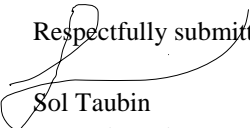
Dear Chairman Craven and Members of the Committee,

Given that the mere filing of an eviction notice can result in the denial of a tenant's rental application--even on grounds ultimately deemed retaliatory, discriminatory, or completely frivolous—the Providence Human Relations Commission wholeheartedly support the sealing of court records for eviction cases that result in verdicts for the tenant wherein no appeals are taken.

The Providence Human Relations Commission works to eliminate unlawful discrimination and empower the people of Providence through education, advocacy and collaboration, to ensure access to resources, protection of rights, and promotion of positive community relations. Formed in 1963, the Commission's goal is to foster mutual understanding and respect among the City's diverse populations, and ensure equal opportunities for all Providence residents in housing, education, employment, credit and public accommodations, by combating discrimination.

Throughout the years, in partnership with the Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights, the Providence Human Relations Commission has processed many a discrimination complaint in which a tenant has been wrongfully evicted from their home on the basis of their race, color, familial status, gender identity/expression, marital status, status as a victim of domestic abuse, housing status, military status, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age, or country of ancestral origin, or on the basis of retaliation. Though often winning their cases, these individuals have no protections when they go to apply for new housing opportunities. Landlords reviewing their applications can see eviction notices were filed against them, online. Sealing court records protects tenants that were wrongfully evicted as a result of discrimination and retaliation, as well as tenants that, in following the law, are excused from paying rent when a landlord fails to provide heat, water, electricity or gas (RI 34-18-31) and might be evicted for this nonetheless. The current practice of not sealing court records penalizes individuals subject to discriminatory or retaliatory eviction practices, as well as low-income individuals subject to poor housing stock, predatory landlords, and lack of adequate legal defense. As such, the Providence Human Relations Commission strongly supports the sealing of court records in cases where the resolution of an eviction complaint results in a verdict for the tenant, and no appeal is taken. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,


Sol Taubin

Executive Director of the Providence Human Relations Commission & Interim ADA Coordinator
City of Providence