



June 12, 2017

Senate Judiciary Committee & House Judiciary Committee
State House
Providence, RI 02903

Dear Senate Judiciary and House Judiciary Committees,

On behalf of the RI Interfaith Coalition to Reduce Poverty, we ask you to support **Senate Bill 236** and **House Bill 5266**, bills that would **prohibit discrimination in housing based on a person's receipt of a lawful source of income.**

Rhode Island currently has a shortage of decent, affordable housing, and many families struggle to find housing they can afford in safe, stable neighborhoods. The problem of finding housing can be even more difficult for families who pay part or all of their rent with income from sources other than employment, such as state or federal housing assistance, social security, pensions, child support, alimony or other lawful sources of income. Prospective tenants with these forms of lawful income are often denied housing simply because of the source of their income.

This is particularly true for families that receive Section 8 rental assistance vouchers. Across Rhode Island, about 8,300 households receive these person-based vouchers, which they can use to help pay their rent. In Rhode Island, it is legal for a landlord to deny tenancy to a potential renter due to their receipt of a Section 8 voucher. Since landlords in higher income areas are more likely to refuse to accept vouchers, Section 8 voucher holders have fewer housing options in communities with safer neighborhoods, or better schools. Sometimes, Section 8 voucher holders are unable to find a landlord willing to accept the voucher at all, and then ultimately have to forfeit the rental voucher.

A growing number of states and municipalities have taken steps to address this problem. More than 13 states around the country, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont and Maine, have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on source of income, and nearly 50 municipalities have adopted similar local ordinances.

We understand that concerns expressed by the RI Realtors Association and the Bankers Association, the only organizations to raise concerns about the legislation, have been addressed with revised bill language. We strongly urge you to support the legislation as revised and remove this unfair barrier to low-income people accessing housing that meets their needs. Renters who receive a verifiable source of legal income, such as social security, child support, SSI and Section 8 rental assistance vouchers, should not be automatically assumed to be unacceptable or undesirable tenants. Every renter should be given an equal opportunity to apply for housing and be evaluated on their merits.

Sincerely,

Maxine Richman & Rev. Betsy Aldrich Garland
Co-Chairs of the Steering Committee

Emily Jones
Interfaith Coordinator