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July 31, 2026

Stanley Pikul
Inspector of Buildings/Building Official
Department of Inspection and Zoning
155 Gansett Avenue
Cranston, RI 02910

VIA EMAIL AND MAIL¹

Dear Mr. Pikul:

The American Civil Liberties Union of Rhode Island has been contacted by Mr. David Rozen, a tenant at 1112 Reservoir Avenue, whose landlord received emails from you on July 22nd and 23rd demanding the immediate removal of political signs – posted by Mr. Rozen with the property owner’s permission – on the property. The signage, among other things, lists members of the General Assembly who voted on a bill amending the state’s cannabis laws that adversely affected Mr. Rozen. He has shared with us the recent correspondence between you, him, and the property owner, and your actions raise concerns in terms of their impact on his exercise of First Amendment rights. Those concerns are not alleviated by the latest development he has brought to our attention, which is a formal notice of violation from you dated July 24th and received by the property owner on Wednesday, alleging violations of state and local law.

To start with the email exchanges, we believe they suggest that the nature and scope of your responses may be based, at least in part, on the political nature of the signage. That is deeply troubling. Among other things, we note the somewhat surprising demand you initially made of the landlord to immediately remove the signs without any semblance of due process; your unauthorized threat to otherwise have somebody take down the signs before any formal proceedings, including the issuance of a citation, had taken place; and your failure to cite any specific ordinance violation in issuing this ultimatum, which you withdrew only *after* conferring with the City Solicitor.

The follow-up July 23rd email you sent the landlord, [REDACTED], after talking with the City Solicitor, was just as troubling. We particularly make note of the demand that she “provide a stamped, surveyed site plan to verify compliance” with a zoning ordinance addressing street corner visibility on the grounds that “*it appears* that corner visibility *may* be obstructed [by the fence-affixed political signs] ... creating a public safety hazard for vehicles.” (emphasis added)

¹ We have tried our best to address this letter properly, but we note that the job title, office department, and mailing address that appear on your email signature block differ from what appears on the notice of violation letter, and that the domain address on your emails differs from the domain address on your signature block.

We question the demand for this onerous, and undoubtedly costly, "compliance" requirement for an alleged violation of the zoning ordinance that your email did not even confirm actually exists. Nor does it offer other alternatives, such as removing only that portion of the fence sign claimed and found to be obstructive so that Mr. Rozen can maintain the sign on the larger portion of the fence that clearly would not implicate that zoning restriction in any way.

The formal notice of violation dated July 24th only heightens our concerns. It contains a new allegation in which the City of Cranston appears to be taking the position that R.I.G.L. § 23-27.3-113.1 requires property owners to obtain a permit before being allowed to post signs, including political signs, on their property. While that statute strikes us as being completely inapplicable, your notice to [REDACTED] seems to formally attempt to apply it in a manner that threatens to suppress political speech protected by the First Amendment.

Under the circumstances, we believe Mr. Rozen and [REDACTED] deserve an explanation of the various demands and threats made this past week that would provide assurances that they are not related to the content of the signage being displayed and that offers a clearer demonstration that the signage contravenes the laws cited in the violation notice.

Thank you in advance for your prompt consideration of this matter, and I look forward to hearing back from you about it at the earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven Brown", written in a cursive style.

Steven Brown
Executive Director

cc: David Rozen

[REDACTED]
Christopher Millea, City Solicitor