



128 Dorrance Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903
Phone: (401) 831-7171
Fax: (401) 831-7175
www.riaclu.org
info@riaclu.org

ACLU OF RI POSITION: SUPPORT

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF 22-H 7680, RELATING TO PROPERTY – IMMIGRATION STATUS March 17, 2022

This bill would bar landlords from inquiring about a tenant or prospective tenant's immigration or citizenship status, and further bars municipalities from requiring such inquiries. The ACLU of RI strongly supports this legislation. It is especially appropriate to do so in light of the package of bills recently introduced by the House leadership to address some of the serious housing issues facing the state.

The possibility of discrimination against legal immigrants, permanent residents, and even U.S. citizens is greatly increased when landlords have the opportunity to make inquiries like these, which should be none of their business. Such inquiries are essentially a proxy for discriminating against individuals based on their appearance, surname, ethnicity, race or similar inappropriate characteristics.

Unfortunately, we know from agencies that work with immigrant communities that this is a real problem that families encounter in Rhode Island. We also know that some landlords use knowledge of a tenant's undocumented immigration status to deter them from reporting housing violations. This type of exploitation is deeply troubling and cruel and, it should be worth noting, is also used against mixed families that consist of both documented and undocumented family members. Landlords simply should not be allowed to play the role of either immigration agents or "blackmailers" by seeking this information.

In short, shelter is a basic necessity of life. Denying people the right to obtain it – or discouraging them from even applying for it – on the basis of irrelevant and discriminatory inquiries should be banned. Other states – as diverse as California, Michigan, and North Carolina – have enacted laws protecting immigrants' access to housing, and Rhode Island should do the same.

Passage of this legislation should be part of any package of housing legislation that the House considers this session, for this type of discriminatory conduct is one of the elements that creates difficulties for a certain vulnerable class of tenants to find housing.

Thank you for considering our views, and we hope you will act favorably on them.