

Ending Housing Discrimination Based on Source of Income



The Need

- In 2017, **half of all renters in RI were housing cost burdened** (spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs). Nearly 80% of low-income renters were housing cost burdened.
- From 2000-2017, the number of **cost burdened renters has increased by 40%**.
- According to HousingWorks RI at RWU's 2018 Factbook, a household would need to earn over \$55,000 to afford an average two-bedroom apartment in the state. However, the average renter household earns less than \$35,000.

The Solution

Rhode Island should pass legislation that makes it illegal for landlords to deny tenancy solely because of one's lawful source of income. **Fourteen states and Washington, DC, plus 76 counties and municipalities, have already made this kind of discrimination illegal, including Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine and Vermont.**

Every tenant deserves to be considered by landlords based on their own qualifications as a renter, not stereotypes about the source of their income. This legislation would not apply to owner-occupied buildings with three or fewer units, and would not prevent landlords from inquiring about a tenant's income level. Ensuring that potential renters are not discriminated against based on their lawful source of income will help to meet Rhode Island's housing needs and increase housing opportunities for low-income renters at no cost to the State.

The Problem

After waiting sometimes years to receive a rental assistance voucher, all too often tenants find that they cannot find a landlord who will rent to them, simply because of the source of their income. Some landlords on Craigslist, or other online or print services, state right in the ad, "No Section 8." This year, a survey conducted in Rhode Island showed that voucher holders are barred from over 80% of apartments they can afford due to source of income discrimination.

Addressing the Need

State and federal income supports, such as rental assistance vouchers, provide critical resources to help meet the housing needs of low-income Rhode Island-ers. With many of these programs, including the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP), commonly known as "Section 8," the renter pays 30% of their income towards rent, and the voucher covers the balance. Rental assistance allows program participants to rent an apartment in their community of choice – increasing housing opportunities and reducing the concentration of poverty.

Approximately 9,300 RI households receive rental assistance through HCVP.