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Testimony Re: Senate Bill 2301 Regarding Housing Discrimination Based on Source of Income

Senate Judiciary Committee

March 1, 2018

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Madam Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its support for Senate Bill 2301. This bill would prohibit discrimination in housing against people who have a lawful source of income, including a Section 8 (Housing Choice) voucher or any other type of rental assistance.

Every year in the *Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, we report data on the cost of housing and the number of children who experience homelessness. In 2017, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Rhode Island (including utilities) was \$1,385 per month. A worker would have to earn \$26.63 an hour and work 40 hours a week year-round to be able to afford this rent without a cost burden. This hourly wage was more than two and a half times the state's 2017 minimum wage of \$9.60 per hour.

Last year, in 2017, 539 families with 998 children from across the state stayed at emergency homeless shelters, domestic violence shelters, and transitional housing programs. These homeless children made up about one-quarter (22%) of the people who used homeless shelters in 2017.

Affordable housing and rental vouchers can help low-income families afford the high cost of housing. However, there are not enough affordable housing units or vouchers to meet the need. When a family waits the 5 to 8 years it normally takes to receive a Housing Choice Voucher or is fortunate enough to qualify for State Rental Assistance funded through the real estate transfer tax increase that the General Assembly passed in 2014, they should not face additional barriers to obtaining housing due to discrimination.

We encourage you to support this bill and join 13 other states (including our neighboring New England states – Massachusetts, Connecticut, Maine, and Vermont) and Washington, DC in making it illegal for landlords to discriminate against potential tenants purely because of their source of income.

Thank you for the leadership that the General Assembly has shown in addressing the need for affordable housing and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.