



**RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT**  
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## Testimony Re: House Bill 5137 Regarding Fair Housing Practices

House Judiciary Committee

March 12, 2019

Stephanie Geller, Deputy Director

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT would like to voice its strong support for House Bill 5137. This bill would prohibit discrimination in housing based on a person's lawful source of income, such as Veteran's benefits, Social Security, child support, or a Section 8 (Housing Choice) voucher or 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 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.

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 rental 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 housing due to discrimination, yet we know they do. Families are being turned away from dozens of units before they find a landlord that will rent to them with a voucher; and some simply give up and return their voucher. This discrimination should not be allowed to occur.

We ask you to support this bill and join 14 other states (including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and Vermont), Washington, DC, and 76 counties and municipalities that have enacted laws prohibiting discrimination based on 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.

