

Roberta DiMezza

From: Gerald Willis <willisg@salve.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, March 26, 2024 11:13 AM
To: House Judiciary Committee
Cc: Rep. Stewart, Jennifer A.; Camilo Viveiros
Subject: My testimony for tomorrow night's hearing on H 7304

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Roberta DiMezza
Clerk for the House Judiciary Committee

Dear Roberta,

Please accept my testimony below in support of tomorrow's scheduled hearing on H 7304 (amendments to the Residential Landlord and Tenant Act), as I might not be able to attend in person. Thank you.

To the House Judiciary Committee:

I am a former landlord who supports H 7304. And I have a terrible story to share with you.

Our current law only requires 30 days notice for a rent increase – this is not enough time for a renter who cannot afford a rent increase to find another place to live.

I used to own a few rental properties around the state, and followed the laws that allowed me to raise rent with little notice multiple times and evict tenants when they couldn't pay. I'd like to tell you about one particular tenant.

This tenant, Miguel, was late with the rent. I always took my property manager's advice about what to charge for rent. We had raised his rent with 30 day's notice. And when, according to state law, he was late with his rent, we started his eviction.

In RI it's easy to raise the rent on a tenant and then evict a tenant for non-payment. So, as I had done before, I made one phone call to my property manager to evict him and he did the rest. It was a simple, quick process.

I didn't have to go to court, didn't have to talk with a lawyer, didn't even have to go to the apartment. I just paid my property manager \$500.00 and that was that. The eviction was served and the tenant was forced out on a snowy, bitterly cold day in February. Done. I didn't think much about it, and just figured my former tenant had a place to go.

A week later he died in an unheated garage. He had nowhere to go.

The realization of this hit me hard. I felt terrible guilt. I tried to justify my actions. A tenant didn't pay his rent, so I just followed the laws that allowed me to do this. And it was easy. And quick. I had that unit re-rented in a week or two.

But someone had died. And I have to live with the realization that my actions -- my completely legal actions -- had this consequence.

Sometimes laws are unjust. And to evict people in the middle of the winter is unjust. To evict so quickly is unjust. To raise rents quickly and/or frequently is unjust.

Something needs to be changed.

H 7304 would require 90 days notice for most renters (and 120 days for those 62 and older). By increasing the number of days people have prior to a rent increase, this bill seeks to give all renters an opportunity to adjust budgets, seek additional employment, or get a security deposit together. It seeks to reduce stress for families by ensuring people have more time to figure out what's next and how to remain housed.

I wish, every day since he died, that I had done more for Miguel, instead of treating him as another tenant late with the rent. After all, I was just following the law.

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