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**Testimony in Support of H7304**  
**House Judiciary Committee**  
**Submitted by Samuel E. Cramer**  
**March 27, 2024**

“Unfortunately, the clock is ticking, the hours are going by. The past increases, the future recedes. Possibilities decreasing, regrets mounting.” – Haruki Murakami

Rhode Island Center for Justice (CFJ) is a non-profit public interest law firm that provides free legal services to low-income residents throughout Rhode Island. The CFJ actively represents low-wage renters in Rhode Island, many of whom have been directly impacted by sudden, enormous rent increases. The CFJ strongly supports H7304 as a measure to alleviate the undue stress and insecurity experienced by our neighbors as a result of rent increases currently allowable under RI law.

It is easy for many of us to overlook how hard our neighbors work to make it from day to day, month to month. That the person we buy our coffee from in the morning struggles to pay for her rent and childcare. That the person ringing us up at the grocery store is one week without pay away from choosing between paying for their car which they need to get to work and their housing. That the elderly person who has lived in the first floor of the house across the street that just sold lives on a meager pension and social security, assiduously budgeting to keep up with the bills. It is easy for us to overlook these truths because to confront them is to take account of our own choices, to acknowledge we are connected, to commit ourselves to alleviate suffering.

Our work at the Center for Justice compels us to confront difficult truths, to provide counsel and hopefully a path forward. We routinely work with members of the community who call and ask whether their landlord can raise the rent as much as the landlord proposes and so soon. We have worked with elderly people on fixed incomes who live in houses that have recently sold, leading the new landlord to raise the rent by 100% in 60 days. We have worked with hard working single parents who have been offered the ultimatum of accepting a rent increase from \$1,000 per month to \$1,600 per month with 30 days notice or they can move out.

The choice to accept a crippling rent increase or move on 30 days notice (60 for people over 62) causes an immense disruption in people’s lives. Often a rent increase notice is accompanied by a termination of tenancy notice, which means that if a person can’t pay the increased rent and can’t move in 30 days, the landlord can begin the eviction process. H7304 correctly recognizes the current housing crisis that so many of us are living through. When vacancy rates are so low and rents are increasing at such incredible rates, people of limited means have the most difficulty relocating. And make no mistake, when H7304 proposes to “buy time” for tenants, it is acknowledging that without other legislative responses people will be forced to relocate because of rent increases. H7304 changes the law to allow people to relocate with more dignity and peace.

This bill acknowledges the struggles of our friends and neighbors and offers some relief. This bill presents us the choice to account for a system greatly beneficial to some by protecting the many who are vulnerable to its machinations. We should meet this choice with a resounding “yes” and we encourage this Committee to move H7304 forward.

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