

PVD

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL



Hon. Robert E. Craven, Sr., Chairperson, House Committee on Judiciary,
et al. sitting Judiciary Committee Members, Rhode Island General Assembly

Amnesty International USA Local Group 1016
ITEM: H7967
POSITION: SUPPORT

To The Esteemed Members of the House Committee on Judiciary,

Thank you for considering House Bill 7967, which seeks to extend Rhode Island's Homeless Bill of Rights (RIHBoR) to cover a not all too novel but increasingly visible development in our state's ongoing housing crisis, encampments.

Recent actions taken by public safety, city, and parks and/or police department employees in certain municipalities across RI have called attention to human rights concerns for those of our fellow residents who are not only experiencing homelessness, but are also sleeping in places not meant for habitation, almost always outdoors. These sites are often shared by others in similar situations for their privacy or the relative safety in numbers. These are just as much alternative sites for community and social structures to exist as they are for temporary shelter. Because of the density that entails these camps have often been targeted in ways individuals sleeping rough are not. People in recent news stories from multiple cities seem to be treated as no more than objects to move around and their already precious property itself discarded or simply destroyed. City administrations, moreover, have remained reticent in the face of repeated requests for comment on the human rights protections in place for our neighbors who dwell in the camps that get swept. The situation has not had a very transparent start, but perhaps that is not the fault of the municipalities or their administrations.

Explicit and appropriate considerations need to be paid to the ways jurisdictions are required to respond to encampments so their response is better directed by the intent of RIHBoR. Absent modifications and adaptations of our General Law to the realities on the ground, not only will we

be less able to make a meaningful dent in the housing crisis sooner than later, we almost certainly risk violating the basic human rights and statutory legal rights of some of the most vulnerable members of our society while we slow the process of re-homing everyone.

Amnesty PVD, as a member org of the broader RI housing coalition, **urges the committee to consider this bill favorably and pass it to the House floor for a full vote.**