

## JOCELYN P. ANTONIO, MPH

### Testimony on H-5102, Homeless Bill of Rights House Municipal Government & Housing February 4, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairperson Casey, and members of the House Municipal Government & Housing Committee. My name is Jocelyn Antonio and I serve as the Director of Program Implementation and Policy at the Hassenfeld Child Health Innovation Institute at the Brown University School of Public Health. I am providing this testimony in my personal capacity as a public health professional.

**I strongly urge your favorable consideration and passage of H-5102 – An Act Relating to Property – Homeless Bill of Rights**, sponsored by Representative J. Lombardi and co-sponsored by Representatives Hull, Ajello, Potter, and Felix.

This legislation proposes the **creation of a commission to establish homeless shelter standards through regulations**, a necessary step towards protecting the health and dignity of unhoused individuals in Rhode Island.

In 2024, **2,442 Rhode Islanders were unhoused**, marking a **35% increase** from 2023. Alarming, **950 of them were families with children and unaccompanied youth**. Additionally, Rhode Island has the **second highest rate of chronic homelessness in the nation!**<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1991, the United Nations declared “**the right to adequate housing**” as a **fundamental human right**. We must approach homelessness as what it truly is: **a public health issue**. Folks experiencing homelessness have high rates of chronic mental and physical health conditions, co-occurring disorders, and barriers to care. Additionally, **children who experience family homelessness are at risk of higher stress levels, health problems, and need for pediatric health care**, which also increases costs to the overall system when interventions to address episodes of homelessness are not addressed<sup>2</sup>.

Establishing **standardized regulations for homeless shelters** is essential to mitigating these health risks by ensuring:

- **Safe and Sanitary Living Conditions:** Proper hygiene facilities and maintenance reduce the transmission of diseases.
- **Adequate Space and Ventilation:** Preventing overcrowding and ensuring proper ventilation are essential for respiratory health.
- **Access to Support Services:** Integrating health and social services within shelters can provide immediate care and facilitate long-term health improvements.

I urge your **strong consideration and passage of House Bill 5102** as it represents a **critical step in protecting the health and well-being of Rhode Island’s most vulnerable residents**. I urge the committee to support its passage and reaffirm our state’s commitment to **dignity, health, and housing as a human right**.

Thank you for your time and consideration.  
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1. de Sousa, T. & Henry, M. *The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress*. 117 <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf> (2024).
2. *Housing and Homelessness as a Public Health Issue*. <https://apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-statements/policy-database/2018/01/18/housing-and-homelessness-as-a-public-health-issue> (2017).

