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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

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A N A C T

RELATING TO PROPERTY -- RESIDENTIAL LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT

Introduced By: Senators Mack, Euer, Gu, and Bell

Date Introduced: February 12, 2024

Referred To: Senate Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Chapter 34-18 of the General Laws entitled "Residential Landlord and Tenant
2 Act" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following section:

3 **34-18-61. Tenant's bill of rights.**

4 A tenant shall be provided the following rights:

5 (1)(i) Prior to the commencement of any hearing, the judge shall advise the tenant in any
6 eviction matter, that if they are financially unable to engage counsel and there are children that are
7 permanent residents of the dwelling, they are entitled to the services of the public defender. The
8 public defender shall, at the request of a judge of the district court, appear in court on behalf of that
9 person.

10 (ii) The tenant shall also be advised that counsel may be available to the tenant from Rhode
11 Island Legal Services or the Rhode Island Center for Justice.

12 (2) The right to habitability in accordance with § 45-24.3-6.

13 (3) Tenants shall be permitted to freely and peacefully come together, free from
14 harassment, to organize for their rights in accordance with § 34-18-46.

15 (4) A first right of refusal to purchase the real property in which they reside in the event a
16 landlord desires to sell the property. The landlord shall provide the tenant with a sixty (60) day
17 period to exercise the right of first refusal which shall be based on identical terms the property is
18 offered to any other potential purchaser. This provision shall exclude the sale of a single "dwelling
19 unit" as defined in § 45-24-31.

1 (5) It shall be unlawful for a landlord or any person or other entity whose business includes
2 showing, leasing or renting properties to prospective tenants to discriminate against any person in
3 making available a rental property, or in the terms and conditions of the rental property, because of
4 race, color, religion, marital status, former service in the military irrespective of discharge status,
5 active service in the armed forces, country of ancestral origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender
6 identity or expression, age, disability, familial status, source of income, or employment or lack
7 thereof; criminal record or housing, or credit score.

8 (6) The right to be free from eviction without good cause pursuant to §§ 34-18-35 and 34-
9 18-36.

10 SECTION 2. Sections 34-18-15 and 34-18-30 of the General Laws in Chapter 34-18
11 entitled "Residential Landlord and Tenant Act" are hereby amended to read as follows:

12 **34-18-15. Terms and conditions of rental agreement.**

13 (a) A landlord and a tenant may include in a rental agreement terms and conditions not
14 prohibited by this chapter or other rule of law, including rent, term of the agreement, and other
15 provisions governing the rights and obligations of the parties.

16 (b) In absence of agreement, the tenant shall pay as rent the fair rental value for the use and
17 occupancy of the dwelling unit.

18 (c) Rent is payable without demand or notice at the time and place agreed upon by the
19 parties. Unless otherwise agreed, rent is payable at the dwelling unit and periodic rent is payable at
20 the beginning of any term of one month or less and otherwise in equal monthly installments at the
21 beginning of each month. Unless otherwise agreed, rent is uniformly apportionable from day-to-
22 day.

23 (d) Unless the rental agreement fixes a definite term, the tenancy is week-to-week in case
24 of a roomer who pays weekly rent, and in all other cases month to month.

25 (e) A tenant who is sixty-five (65) years of age or older or who will turn sixty-five (65)
26 during the term of a rental agreement for a dwelling unit may terminate such a rental agreement in
27 order to enter a residential care and assisted living facility, as defined in § 23-17.4-2, a nursing
28 facility, or a unit in a private or public housing complex designated by the federal government as
29 housing for the elderly. The tenant may terminate the rental agreement by notice given in writing
30 to the usual person to whom rental payments are made. The notice shall be accompanied by
31 documentation of admission or pending admission to a facility or housing complex described in
32 this section. Termination of the rental agreement shall be effective no earlier than forty-five (45)
33 days after the first rental payment due date following delivery of written notice of termination.

34 (f)(1) A lease of premises occupied, or intended to be occupied, by a servicemember or a

1 servicemember's dependents may be unilaterally terminated if:

2 (i) The lease is executed by or on behalf of a person who, thereafter, and during the term
3 of the lease, enters military service; or

4 (ii) The servicemember, while in military service, executes the lease and thereafter receives
5 military orders for a change of permanent station or to deploy with a military unit, or as an
6 individual in support of a military operation, for a period of not less than ninety (90) days; and

7 (iii) The lessee delivers to the lessor (or the lessor's grantee), or to the lessor's agent (or
8 the agent's grantee), written notice of the termination, and a copy of the servicemember's military
9 orders.

10 (2) Effective date of lease termination. In the event that a lease provides for monthly
11 payment of rent, termination of the lease under this section is effective thirty (30) days after the
12 first date on which the next rental payment is due and payable after the date on which the notice is
13 delivered.

14 (3) In the case of any other lease, termination of the lease is effective on the last day of the
15 month following the month in which the notice is delivered.

16 (4) The lessee shall be responsible for rent amounts of the lease that are unpaid for the
17 period preceding the effective date of the lease termination on a prorated basis. The lessor may not
18 impose an early termination charge, but any taxes, summonses, or other obligations and liabilities
19 of the lessee in accordance with the terms of the lease, including reasonable charges to the lessee
20 for excess wear, that are due and unpaid at the time of termination of the lease, shall be paid by the
21 lessee.

22 (5) Rent paid in advance. Rents or lease amounts paid in advance for a period after the
23 effective date of the termination of the lease shall be refunded to the lessee by the lessor (or the
24 lessor's assignee or the assignee's agent) within thirty (30) days of the effective date of the
25 termination of the lease.

26 (6) A lessee's termination of a lease pursuant to this section shall terminate any obligation
27 a dependent of the lessee may have under the lease.

28 (g) Prior to the expiration of a lease, and upon written agreement between a landlord and
29 tenant to renew a lease, the default renewal period shall be year-to-year. The tenant shall retain the
30 exclusive option to waive this default year-to-year term in favor of a differing renewal term agreed
31 to by both the tenant and the landlord. Upon renewal of a lease, a landlord may not raise rent more
32 than four percent (4%) in a given year absent articulable evidence necessitating an increase of rent
33 at a rate greater than four percent (4%) in a given year.

34 **34-18-30. Self-help for limited repairs. [Effective January 1, 2024.]**

1 (a) If the landlord fails to comply with § 34-18-22(a)(1), (2), (4), (5), or (6), and the
2 reasonable cost of compliance is less than ~~five hundred dollars (\$500) in the aggregate per year~~ an
3 amount equal to one month's rent, the tenant may cause repairs to be done in a skilled manner, in
4 compliance with applicable state and local codes, and deduct from the tenant's rent the actual and
5 reasonable cost or the fair and reasonable value of the repairs if:

6 (1) The tenant notifies the landlord of the tenant's intention to correct the condition at the
7 landlord's expense; and

8 (2) The landlord fails to comply within twenty (20) days, or fails to demonstrate ongoing,
9 good faith efforts to comply, after being notified by the tenant in writing; or, in the case of
10 emergency, the landlord either cannot be reached by the tenant, or the landlord fails to comply as
11 promptly as conditions require; and

12 (3) The tenant submits an itemized statement to the landlord of the cost or the fair and
13 reasonable value of the repairs made.

14 (b) A tenant may not repair at the landlord's expense if the condition was caused by the
15 deliberate or negligent act or omission of the tenant, a member of the tenant's family, or other
16 person on the premises with the tenant's consent.

17 SECTION 3. Section 45-24.3-6 of the General Laws in Chapter 45-24.3 entitled "Housing
18 Maintenance and Occupancy Code" is hereby amended to read as follows:

19 **45-24.3-6. Responsibilities of owners and occupants.**

20 (a) No owner or operator or other person shall occupy, or let to another person, any vacant
21 dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure unless it and the premises are clean, sanitary, fit for human
22 occupancy, and comply with this chapter and all applicable legal requirements of the state and the
23 corporate unit.

24 (b) Every owner of a multiple dwelling is responsible for maintaining, in a clean and
25 sanitary condition, the shared or public areas of the dwelling and premises. Occupants of two (2)
26 and three (3) family dwellings shall share the maintenance of clean and sanitary conditions within
27 the shared or public areas of the dwelling and premises.

28 (c) Every occupant of a dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure shall maintain in a clean
29 sanitary condition that part or those parts of the dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure and premises
30 that the occupant occupies and controls.

31 (d) Every occupant of a dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure shall dispose of all his or her
32 rubbish in a clean, sanitary, and safe manner.

33 (e) Every occupant of a dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure shall dispose of all his or her
34 garbage and any other organic waste which might provide food for insects and/or rodents in a clean,

1 sanitary, and safe manner, and if a container is used for storage pending collection it shall be rodent
2 proof, insect proof, and watertight.

3 (f) Every owner or operator of a dwelling containing four (4) or more dwelling units shall
4 supply facilities or containers for the sanitary and safe storage and/or disposal of rubbish and
5 garbage. In the case of single, two (2) or three (3) family dwellings and structures it is the
6 responsibility of the occupant to furnish those facilities or refuse containers.

7 (g) The owner of a dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure is responsible for providing and
8 hanging all screens and double or storm doors and windows where used for ventilation whenever
9 they are required under the provisions of this chapter or any rule or regulation adopted pursuant to
10 this chapter, except where there is a written agreement between the owner and occupant. In the
11 absence of an agreement, maintenance or replacement of screens, and storm doors and windows,
12 once installed in any one season, become the responsibility of the occupant.

13 (h) The owner of a dwelling or dwelling unit is responsible for the providing and hanging
14 of shades or other devices on every window of every room used for sleeping and for every room
15 equipped with a flush water closet or bathtub, affording privacy to persons within those rooms.
16 Once installed in any one rental by the owner, replacements become the responsibility of the
17 occupant.

18 (i) Every occupant of a dwelling containing a single dwelling unit and every occupant of a
19 structure is responsible for the extermination of any insects, rodents, or other pests therein or on
20 the premises. Every occupant of a dwelling unit, in a dwelling containing more than one dwelling
21 unit, is responsible for this extermination whenever his or her dwelling is the only one infected.
22 Notwithstanding the foregoing provisions of this subsection, whenever infestation is caused by a
23 failure of the owner to maintain a dwelling in a rodent-proof or reasonably insect-proof condition,
24 extermination is the responsibility of the owner. Whenever infestation exists in two (2) or more of
25 the dwelling units in any dwelling, or in the shared or public parts of any dwelling containing two
26 (2) or more dwelling units, extermination is the responsibility of the owner.

27 (j) Every occupant of a dwelling unit or structure shall keep all supplied plumbing fixtures
28 and facilities in a clean and sanitary condition, and is responsible for the exercise of reasonable
29 care in their proper use and operation.

30 (k) No owner or occupant of a dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure shall accumulate or
31 permit the accumulation of rubbish, boxes, lumber, scrap metal, or any other materials in a manner
32 that may provide a rodent harborage in or about any dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure. Stored
33 materials shall be stacked neatly in piles elevated at least eighteen inches (18") above the ground
34 or floor. The provisions of this subsection do not apply to firewood or kindling wood stored in or

1 about any dwelling, dwelling unit, or structure by the owner or occupant of that property; provided,
2 that the wood is stored for use within the dwelling, dwelling unit or structure, unless prohibited by
3 town or city ordinance.

4 [\(l\) Every owner of a multiple dwelling is responsible for the mitigation of insect infestation](#)
5 [including, but not limited to, bed bugs, ants, cockroaches, termites, fleas and flies. The owner shall](#)
6 [be required to obtain an inspection of the infestation not more than ninety-six \(96\) hours after](#)
7 [receiving notice from the occupant. The owner shall be required to communicate to the occupant](#)
8 [the results of the inspection within two \(2\) business days of the inspection. The owner shall be](#)
9 [required to commence mitigation efforts within five \(5\) business days of receiving notice from an](#)
10 [inspector of the presence of an infestation.](#)

11 SECTION 4. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF
A N A C T
RELATING TO PROPERTY -- RESIDENTIAL LANDLORD AND TENANT ACT

1 This act would create a tenant bill of rights to include the right to counsel for indigent
2 tenants with children, the right to habitability, the right to organize free from harassment, the right
3 to not be discriminated against based on race, religion, sexual orientation, source of income,
4 criminal record or credit score, the right of first refusal if the landlord decides to sell the property,
5 and a limitation on rent increases to four percent (4%) per year unless the landlord can articulate
6 necessity for a greater increase. This act would further provide a tenant with the right to deduct up
7 to the sum of one month's rent for repairs.

8 This act would take effect upon passage.

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