

RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No.

WHEREAS, On January 17, 2019, Rhode Island Representatives Anastasia P. Williams (D), K. Joseph Shekarchi (D), Camille Vella-Wilkinson (D), Jason Knight (D), and Jean Philippe Barros (D) introduced House Bill 5137; and

WHEREAS, On February 13, 2019, Rhode Island Senators Harold M. Metts (D), Elizabeth A. Crowley (D), Ana B. Quezada (D), Frank A. Ciccone III (D), and Samuel W. Bell (D) introduced Senate Bill 331; and

WHEREAS, In 2017, half of all renters in Rhode Island and nearly 80% of all low-income renters were housing cost burdened; and

WHEREAS, From 2000-2017 the number of cost burdened renters has increased by 40%; and

WHEREAS, A recent survey conducted in Rhode Island showed that over 60% of landlords do not accept rental assistance vouchers; and

WHEREAS, The City of Providence is committed to ensuring that its residents have access to safe and decent housing they can afford; and

WHEREAS, More than 3,000 households in the City of Providence currently receive rental assistance vouchers from the Section 8 program, representing about one-third of all voucher holders in the state; and

WHEREAS, Discrimination against renters that rely on income other than wages to pay their rent is a significant barrier to accessing affordable housing, particularly for seniors, veterans, low-income families and those with disabilities; and

WHEREAS, Legislation preventing housing discrimination on the basis of a tenant's source of income would help improve the ability of low-income residents to access housing they can afford at no cost to the community or the state; and

WHEREAS, 14 states around the country, including Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts and Vermont, as well as 76 counties and municipalities have passed laws prohibiting discrimination against tenants based on their lawful source of income, including rental assistance, social security and other supplemental sources of income; and

WHEREAS, Passage of this resolution would resolve to prohibit discrimination in housing against those individuals who have a lawful source of income; and

WHEREAS, The bills define "lawful source of income" as "income or other assistance derived from Social Security; Supplemental Security Income; any other federal, state or local general public assistance, including medical assistance; any federal, state or local housing assistance, including Section 8 Housing ..., and any other rental assistance; child support; or alimony"; and

WHEREAS, "Lawful source of income" would be added to the list of statuses landlords currently cannot use as a basis for their decisions on whom they will rent to; and

WHEREAS, In a letter of support for the bills, the Executive Director of Rhode Island Housing stated that the bill will “prohibit reliance on stereotypes about recipients of public assistance in determining an applicant’s suitability as a tenant”; and

WHEREAS, The Rhode Island Association of Realtors also showcased support for the bills, stating that they “mitigate administrative burdens placed on landlords”; and

WHEREAS, As public servants and the elected representatives of the people of Providence, the City Council has an obligation to ensure that residents have fair and equitable access to housing, regardless of their economic means.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the Providence City Council supports House Bill 5137 and Senate Bill 331 to ban source of income discrimination, believing it to be in the best interests of the residents we serve and urges the General Assembly to pass and Governor Raimondo to sign such legislation in 2019.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be sent to the Governor, the Speaker of the House, the President of the Senate, and all Senators and Representatives representing the city of Providence.