



Housing Choice Voucher Program

Owner • Landlord Participation Guide





HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM (HCV Program)

OWNER/LANDLORD PARTICIPATION GUIDE

Thank you for your interest in partnering with RIHousing by participating in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program.

The HCV Program is a federally-funded program administered by RIHousing. The program helps families obtain safe, healthy homes by subsidizing a portion of each tenant's monthly rent.

Paperwork is minimal and the property owner retains normal management rights and responsibilities, including tenant selection, rent collection, property maintenance and lease termination.

The following guidebook provides information on being a landlord for a HCV Program tenant. The guidebook covers the most common areas of interest to owners, but it is not intended to cover all areas of renting to HCV Program participants.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to contact RIHousing's HCV Program staff at 401-429-1614.



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HCV PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS

The HCV Program assists income eligible tenants from across the state. Participants may be single people, couples, families with children or the elderly. The program helps tenants find a home in the community of their choice by paying a portion of their rent.

ELIGIBLE COMMUNITIES

Participants in RIHousing's HCV Program can rent in the following 19 towns:

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Bristol | Exeter | Jamestown |
| Barrington | Foster | Little Compton |
| Block Island | Glocester | Middletown |
| Charlestown | Hopkinton | Narragansett |
| Newport | Richmond | |
| North Kingstown | Scituate | |
| North Smithfield | West Greenwich | |
| Portsmouth | | |

Towns not on the above list have their own Public Housing Authorities (PHA) that administer the HCV Program in their community. If a property owner has a rental unit located outside of the towns on this list, they should contact the PHA in the municipality where the unit is located for more information.

HOW THE PROGRAM WORKS

Tenants apply to RIHousing to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Though the waitlist for a voucher is extremely long, once an individual/family is chosen they are issued the voucher and able to select rental housing of their choice in the private rental market.

TYPICALLY,
program participants reside in multi-family residential communities, single family rental housing and duplex units. All types of rental housing are eligible for the program.

RIHOUSING provides monthly rental assistance directly to participating property owners, while the tenant pays their portion of rent directly to the property owner.

RIHOUSING inspects rental units prior to a tenant's move in and biennially thereafter. Inspections ensure units are safe and healthy places for tenants to live.

THE PARTNERSHIP

RIHousing partners with property owners and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to ensure quality affordable housing for low income families.

The property owner and the tenant enter a lease when rent is approved, and the unit passes Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection.

The tenant pays between 30% and 40% of their income towards rent and RIHousing pays the balance directly to the property owner.

RIHousing and the property owner execute a Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contract, which facilitates payment of the balance of the rent to be paid by RIHousing directly to the property owner.



BENEFITS of participating in the HCV Program

- **Guaranteed rent from RIHousing**
- **Free advertising**
- **Help provide affordable housing to Rhode Island families**



PROPERTY OWNER OBLIGATIONS

Below is a partial listing of a property owner's obligations under the HCV program:

- Thoroughly screen and interview families who apply for units
- Maintain the property by making repairs in a timely manner
- Approve, with RIHousing, all household members residing in the rental unit
- Collect from the tenant any security deposit and the tenant's contribution to rent
 - Enforce tenant obligations under the lease
- Pay for utilities and services (unless paid by the tenant under the lease)
- Comply with the terms of the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Contract
- Submit all communications with or about the tenant in writing to RIHousing and keep all records of correspondence
(This is done to ensure accuracy and prevent misunderstandings)
 - Notify RIHousing if the tenant vacates the property
 - Notify RIHousing of any property ownership change
 - Comply with all fair housing, federal, state and local laws

TENANT OBLIGATIONS

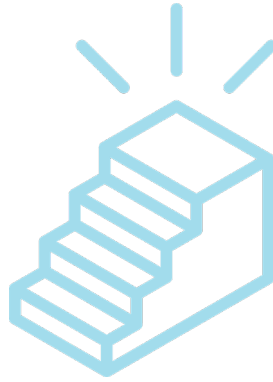
Below is a partial listing of a tenant's obligations under the HCV program:

- Locate a suitable and eligible unit within allowed rental amount range
- Complete required documents and pay security deposit (if required)
 - Attend scheduled appointments and return documents on time
- Provide the property owner and RIHousing with names of all household members residing in the rental unit
- Maintain the property and repair damages beyond normal wear and tear
 - Not sublease the rental unit, assign the lease or transfer the unit
 - Pay their portion of rent on time
 - Pay utility bills, if not covered by the landlord
- Comply with the terms of the lease and all family obligations under the HCV Program

RIHOUSING OBLIGATIONS

Below is a partial listing of RIHousing's obligations under the HCV program:

- Determine the tenant's program eligibility, reasonable rent and unit size
 - Issue voucher to tenant
- Conduct program briefings for tenant and enforce the rules of the program
- Inspect the properties to ensure Housing Quality Standards (HQS) compliance
- Approve the property, the property owner and the lease. This includes approval, with the property owner, of all members of the household residing in the rental unit
 - Sends Housing Assistance Payments to the property owner



STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS

For Participating in the HCV Program

1

Find a Tenant

Eligible tenants are issued a voucher and will contact property owners directly.

Property owners can list their available rental units with RIHousing on HousingSearchRI.org.

To do this, or for more information, contact Knijia Sailsman at (401) 277-1562 or ksailsman@rihousing.com

2

Approve a Tenant

Property owners are encouraged to screen potential tenants based on tenancy history, including factors such as:

- Past rent and bill-paying history
- History of caring for property
- Respecting the rights of others to peaceful enjoyment of the property
- Compliance with essential conditions of tenancy

It is a property owner's responsibility to screen individuals/families for suitability as a tenant. Property owners should screen participants in the HCV Program as they would any other tenant.

Security deposits are the tenant's responsibility, but the amount charged must not exceed one month's rent.

3

Submit a Leasing Packet

Documents property owners must sign and submit in order to participate in the HCV program (some jointly signed with tenant) include:

- Request for Tenancy Approval (RFTA)*
- Owner Certification and proof of property ownership (ex. copy of a deed, water bill, mortgage, home/fire insurance binder) *
- Restriction on leasing to relatives*
- Disclosure of Information on lead-based paint*
- Proof of compliance with the lead hazard mitigation law (refer to Lead Hazard Mitigation Law section of this handbook on page 18)
- W-9, and proof of social security number or EIN used on W-9
- Direct Deposit required for voided checks
- Tentative lease agreement that includes tenant names, proposed rent amount and whether the landlord or tenant covers utilities

*Jointly signed by both property owner and tenant

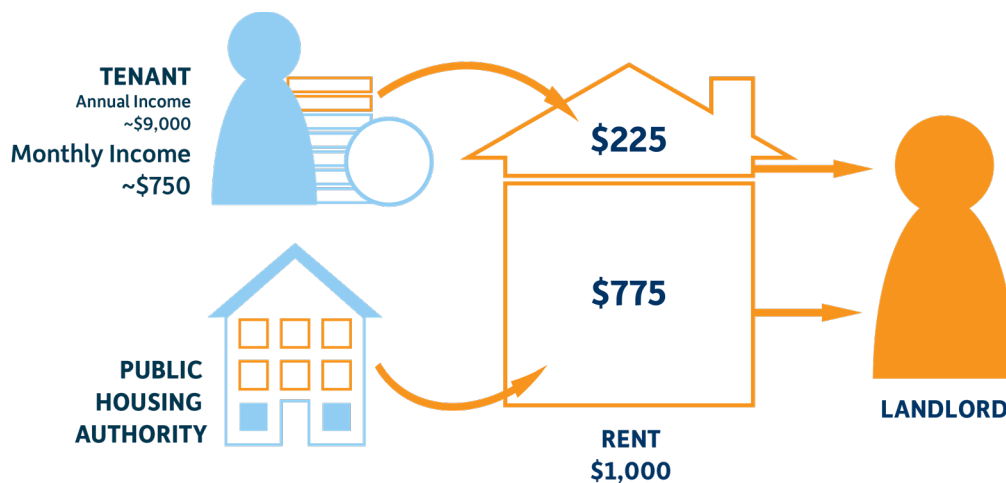
4

Approve a Reasonable Rent

All proposed rents must be approved by a RIHousing market analysis for the initial lease, and for any requested rent increases.

A market analysis determines if the proposed rent is reasonable compared to a unit without a voucher. This analysis takes into consideration location, quality, size, type, age, amenities, maintenance and whether the landlord or tenant covers utilities.

A rent increase may be requested following the 1 year lease term.



Rental Assistance Calculation & Payments

A tenant is generally expected to pay 30% - 40% of their income toward rent and utilities. RIHousing pays the balance of the rent directly to the property owner, known as a housing assistance payment (HAP). Property owners receive payment promptly on the first of each month via direct deposit. Direct deposit is not required, but strongly encouraged to ensure timely receipt of payments.



5

Inspect the Unit

Prior to move-in and then biennially, RIHousing conducts an inspection to ensure the rental unit meets HUD's minimum housing quality standards (HQS). Having the unit move-in ready at the time of inspection will prevent delays in processing housing assistance payments (HAP).

HQS inspections are conducted within 7 to 10 days after the market analysis is complete and rent amount has been approved.

All utilities must be on before the inspection can be conducted.

If a unit fails for a non-life threatening matter, the tenant can still proceed with moving in. The property owner must correct the failed item(s) within 30 days to continue receiving housing assistance payments (HAP).

Special inspections due to compliance/issues in the unit can take place between biennial inspections.



Most Common HQS Failed Items

- ✖ Broken or missing smoke detectors
- ✖ Missing or cracked electrical outlet cover plates
 - ✖ Railings missing where required
 - ✖ Peeling interior or exterior paint
- ✖ Trip hazards caused by installed floor coverings (carpet/vinyl)
 - ✖ Broken windows
- ✖ Inoperable burners on stove or range hoods
 - ✖ Missing burner control knobs
- ✖ Inoperable bathroom fan/no ventilation
 - ✖ Leaking faucets or plumbing
- ✖ No temperature/pressure relief valve on water heaters
- ✖ Lead paint hazards (see more information on page 18)

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS (HQS)

HUD sets forth basic housing quality standards (HQS) which establish the minimum criteria necessary for the health and safety of program participants. Inspections are assessing items covered by HQS.

What is expected during an inspection?

Window that can be
opened or working vent

Smoke detector on
each landing

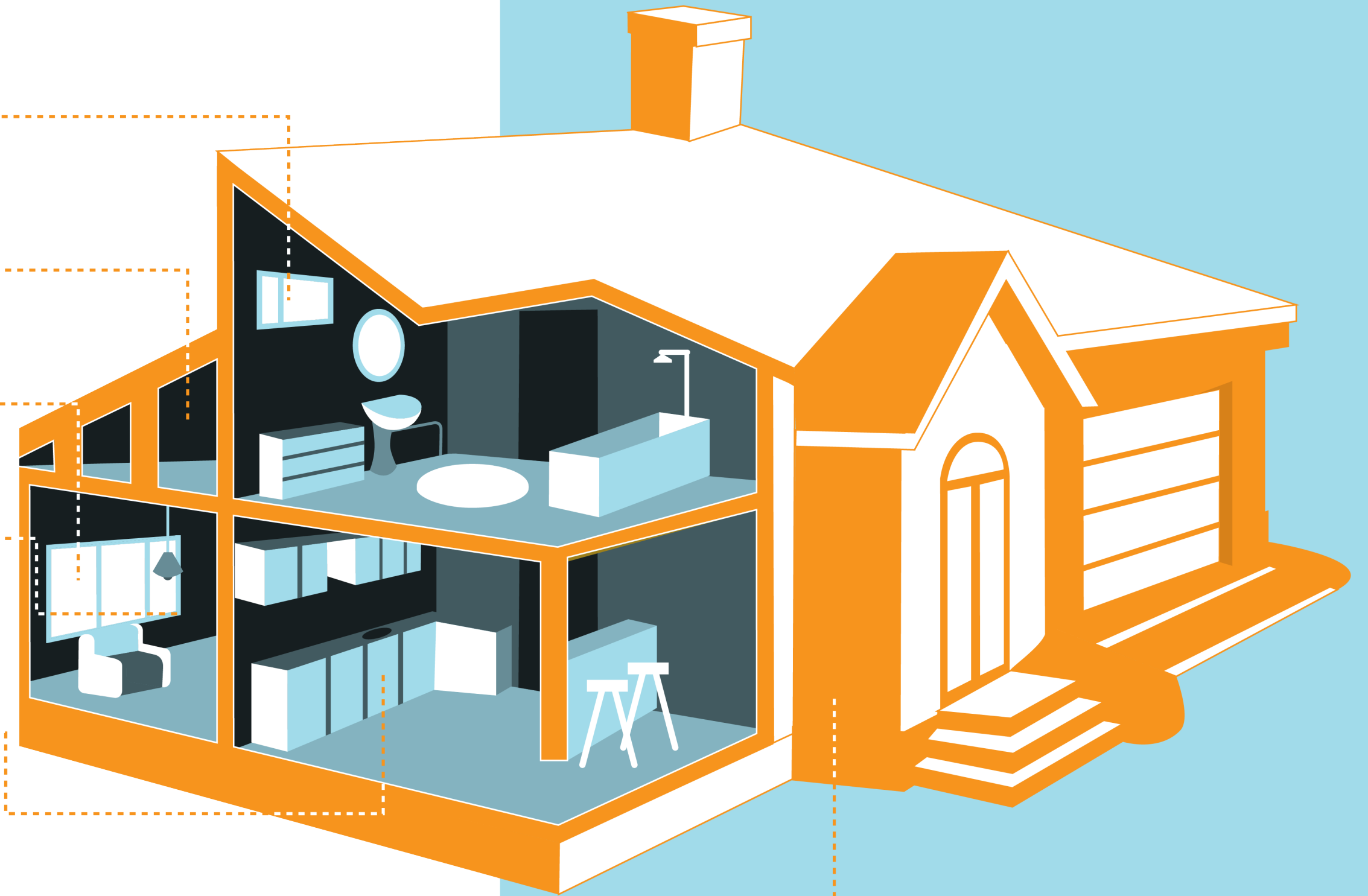
Window shades and screens

Two working outlets or
one working outlet and
one light fixture

Stove with working oven
Sink with hot and cold
water

No large cracks or holes on
building exterior

Remediated lead paint





6

Sign the HAP Contract and Lease!

● **After a Unit Passes Inspection**

Notification will be sent to the property owner once the HAP Contract is ready for signature.

Once the HAP Contract and unit lease are signed and returned, rent payments will begin.

● **Lease**

The tenant will need to sign a lease with the property owner in order to rent the unit. The lease must be the same lease the property owner uses for tenants without vouchers, but will need to meet the dates, approved rent, and requirements in the HAP contract. The initial lease term must be for one year. Following the first year, the lease can become month-to-month at the discretion of the property owner and tenant.

● **Tenancy Addendum**

RIHousing provides a tenancy addendum that includes tenancy requirements for the program and household composition. This addendum is added to the lease and must be signed by the family and the property owner.

LEAD HAZARD MITIGATION LAW

The RI Lead Hazard Mitigation Law requires that all owners of rental properties built before 1978 (except for exempt properties) meet the following three requirements:

1. Receive a Certificate of Conformance from a certified lead inspector for each rental unit owned. In order to remain current, this certificate must be updated every 2 years (lead inspectors can be found online at www.doh.ri.gov)
2. Provide tenants with information about lead hazards, including the Certificate of Conformance
3. Respond to tenant concerns of lead in the home

EXEMPT PROPERTIES

The following pre-1978 units are exempt from the Lead Hazard Mitigation Law:

1. Two- or three-unit properties, in which one of the units is occupied by the property owner
2. Housing that is specifically designated by a regulatory agreement or a zoning ordinance to house persons 62 years of age or older

Owners with exempt properties must provide proof of exemption.

For more information on the Lead Hazard Mitigation Law, contact the Housing Resources Commission (<http://ohcd.ri.gov/hrc/>).

RI Housing administers the LeadSafe program which offers forgivable loans for lead remediation. Please see page 20 for more information on this program.



RIHOUSING RESOURCES FOR LANDLORDS/PROPERTY OWNERS

HOUSING STABILIZATION

RIHousing has dedicated staff available to assist landlords with concerns and questions as they arise. For more information, contact Knijia Sailsman at (401) 277-1562 or ksailsman@rihousing.com.

LANDLORD MITIGATION: Protecting the Owners' Assets

RIHousing offers a Landlord Mitigation program that provides up to \$2,000 for the following scenarios:

- A tenant caused damages in excess of normal wear and tear
- A tenant abandoned the property with unpaid rent
- A vacancy payment for up to 3 months if the tenant left without proper notification and the landlord is unable to rent the unit

Funding is limited and only available during the first two years of tenancy.

HOUSINGSEARCHRI.ORG

Participating landlords can advertise their rental units at no cost on HousingSearchRI, a free apartment listing website. The site allows HCV Program participants to search for available rentals. To list your property, please visit www.HousingSearchRI.org or contact Knijia Sailsman at (401) 277-1562 or ksailsman@rihousing.com.

LEADSAFE HOMES

RIHousing's LeadSafe Homes program helps income eligible Rhode Islanders reduce lead hazards in their homes. There is no cost for these services and includes:

- Forgivable loans to help make a rental property lead safe and increase its value
- Health and safety hazard assessment of a rental property
- Funding is forgiven after five years for homeowners and after 10 years for rental investment properties
- Free, personalized assistance every step of the way

For more information on the LeadSafe Homes Program and the options available to you, contact Fernanda Aguilar at 401-450-1350 or faguilar@rihousing.com.

OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

FAIR HOUSING

Rhode Island Commission for Human Rights
www.richr.ri.gov

HUD Fair Housing
www.hud.gov/fairhousing

South Coast Fair Housing
www.SouthCoastFairHousing.org

RI Center for Justice
www.centerforjustice.org

LANDLORD – TENANT HANDBOOK

Housing Resources Commission
401-222-5323 // www.hrc.ri.gov

LEAD HAZARD MITIGATION

Housing Resources Commission (HRC)
401-222-LEAD (5323) // www.hrc.ri.gov

Department of Health (inspector information)
www.doh.ri.gov

LEGAL QUESTIONS


Rhode Island Legal Services
401-274-2652 // www.rils.org

OFFICE OF HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT (HUD)

Rhode Island HUD Office
401-277-8300; 800-877-8339 (TTY) // www.hud.gov/states/rhode_island/offices

LANDLORD MEDIATION

The Center for Mediation & Collaboration of RI offers mediation services to landlords and tenants. Fees are minimal and offered on a sliding scale to those that qualify. Call 401-273-9999 for assistance.



If you have available units or upcoming availability and would like to lease to RIHousing tenants in the HCV Program, please contact:

Knijia Sailsman

Housing Stabilization Coordinator

Division of Leased Housing and Rental Services

401-277-1562

ksailsman@rihousing.com