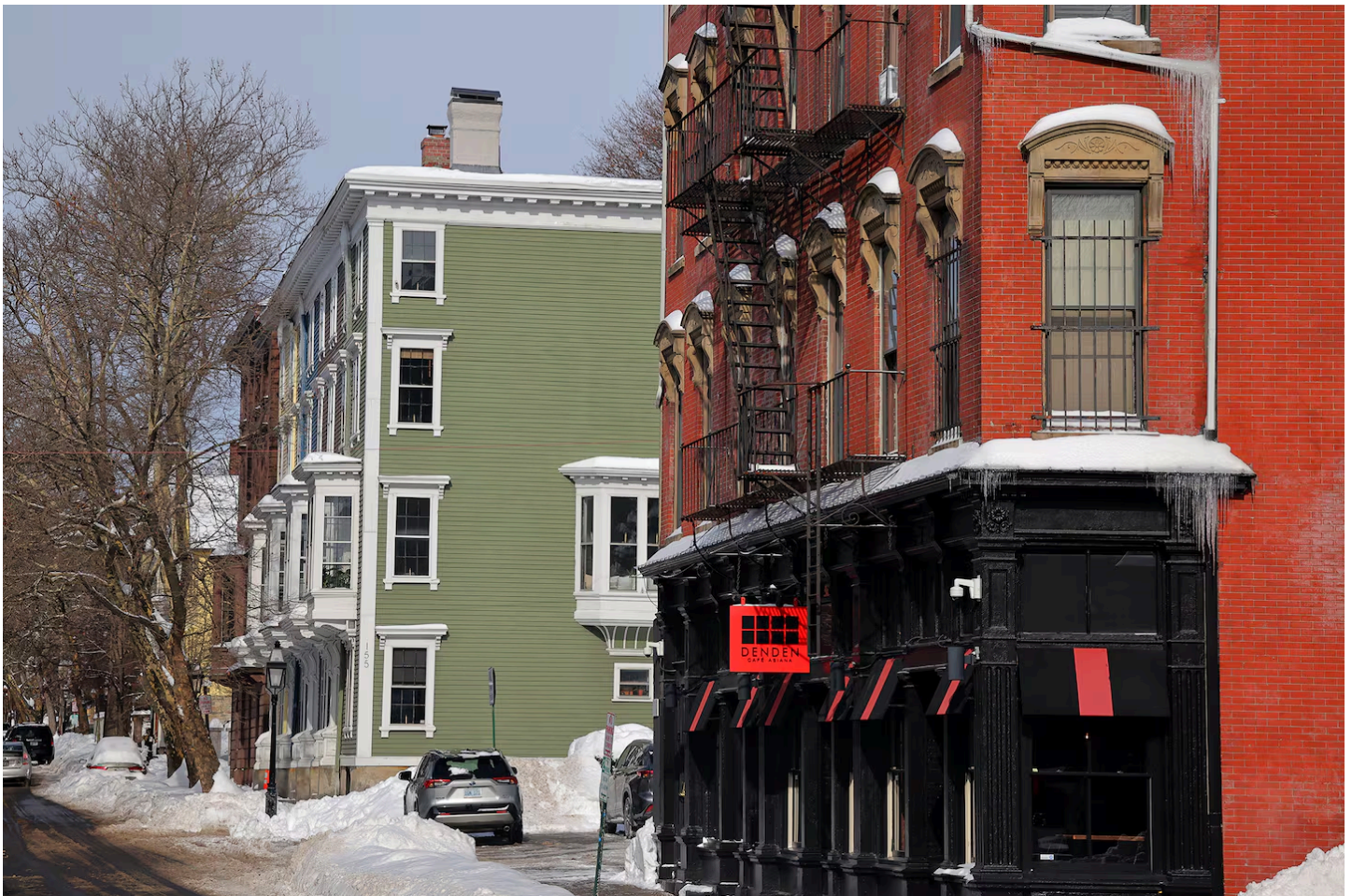


## COMMENTARY

# Rent control does more than protect tenants from rent hikes, it protects their health

R.I. city councilors should overturn Mayor Smiley's veto of the rent stabilization ordinance, which will help support community health, write city councilor and public health leader

By **Justin Roias and Julian Drix** Updated May 15, 2026, 5:55 a.m.



Homes on Benefit Street in Providence, R.I. LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

For years, Providence residents have been demanding transformative solutions to our city's [housing affordability crisis](#). This April, the [City Council](#) took necessary action by passing a thoughtful and balanced rent stabilization ordinance. Despite [widespread support](#) from Providence residents, including tenants, homeowners, small landlords, advocates, and health leaders — as well as abundant evidence on the negative health impacts of housing insecurity — Mayor Brett Smiley [vetoed the ordinance](#).

Vetoing a policy that would protect tenants from steep rent hikes is not only a bad policy decision, it is putting thousands of Providence residents at risk of the negative health impacts caused by rent increases, rent debt, and [eviction](#). Public health [research](#) shows that regulating rent is both a key strategy for housing affordability and an investment in the public's health. Inaction now will come at a great cost to residents who may have to forgo basic necessities because they simply cannot afford increases to their rent.

A [2025 paper](#) on the health benefits of rent control released by leading national public health organizations finds that rent control protects health by slowing rent growth and keeping households more stable in the homes it covers. Affordable rents reduce financial strain, allowing renters to afford the things they need to be healthy — which has a positive impact on health outcomes at the community level.

For instance, severely cost-burdened, [economically struggling families](#) are able to spend 53% less on food, healthcare, and transportation than their peers living in homes they can afford. Being forced to move from one's home, which is often driven by unaffordable rent increases, [is linked to](#) a host of negative physical and mental health impacts, including high blood pressure, depression, anxiety, increased emergency room visits, as well as behavioral and academic issues for children.

Unaffordable rents can even increase mortality. A [Princeton University study](#) found that a 10-percentage point increase in rent burden (rent going from 30 percent to 40 percent of one's income, for example) was associated with an 8 percent higher risk of death. The reality is that housing affordability and stability save lives.

During this moment of stagnant wages, [inflation](#), [federal cuts](#), and attacks on vulnerable communities, Smiley's decision to deny critical relief to struggling renters demonstrates that some of our city leaders are unwilling to take necessary action to keep the city's residents housed and healthy. Instead they are folding to the real estate industry's misinformation campaign. Claims that rent stabilization hurts housing construction or harms property values are misleading scare tactics, and [many studies show evidence to the contrary](#). Unfortunately this did not stop Mayor Smiley from [repeating misleading claims](#) about cities like St. Paul, Minn.

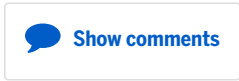
Health experts are familiar with disingenuous industry lobbying and misinformation, from tobacco to fossil fuels to anti-vaxxers. The real estate industry has played a heavy hand in defeating tenant protection legislation, [including here in Rhode Island](#), and harming the health of communities in the process. Corporate real estate investors [have poured millions](#) into defeating tenant-supporting legislation and ballot measures, while bankrolling elected officials' campaigns. Simultaneously, they are [buying up](#) apartments, single-family homes, and manufactured home communities, trying to [maximize profit by neglecting maintenance](#) and using rent-setting software to [artificially inflate rents](#). But local governments have the power to act in service of our communities by pushing back on corporate landlords' unchecked power and greed.

With Providence residents' health and homes at stake, we call on all the members of the City Council to overturn the Mayor Smiley's veto of the rent stabilization ordinance on Friday. By stabilizing rent, councilors will help keep a roof over more Providence residents' heads, while supporting community health and saving lives in the process.

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