



**Testimony of Sarah White  
In Support of H.B. 5685 – An Act Concerning Rent Control**

Sens. Lopes and Anwar, Reps. McGee and Smith, and other members of the Committee: thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify. My name is Sarah White, and I am an attorney at the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, a civil rights organization dedicated to ensuring all of Connecticut's residents have access to the housing of their choice. I'm testifying in support of H.B. 5685, An Act Concerning Rent Control.

**We support enabling legislation that would give municipalities the option of creating a rent control program to make housing more affordable and to protect residents from displacement.** Rent control can take a variety of forms, from annual limits or freezes on rent increases, setting maximum rents, or creating rules to determine fair market rent, and it can cover just some rental units or tenants or the entire rental market. In the 1950s, the Connecticut legislature repealed enabling legislation for rent control, meaning municipalities no longer had the option of enacting rent control, even modest limits on annual amounts or percentages of rent increases. Enabling legislation would not require rent control or determine the parameters of rent control but would instead give towns and cities the choice of creating a rent control program that works for them, if it decides this is in the interests of its residents.

**There's a strong need to give cities more tools, like rent control, to address the twin crises of housing unaffordability and displacement that disproportionately impact Black and Latinx households, which the pandemic threatens to worsen.** Before the pandemic, more than half of renters in Connecticut were cost-burdened, meaning they spent more than 30% of their household income on housing costs. This number was higher for Black and Latinx renters, 60% and 55% of whom, respectively, were cost-burdened.<sup>1</sup> Black and Latinx households have been hardest hit by displacement from their housing, whether as a result of formal or informal eviction, poor housing conditions, or gentrification.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic threatens to worsen housing

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<sup>1</sup> American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimate, 2014-2018.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Eviction Lab [Eviction Tracker for Connecticut](#); DataHaven, [Towards Health Equity in Connecticut: The Role of Social Inequality and the Impact of COVID-19](#); Jaboa Lake, [The Pandemic Has Exacerbated Housing Instability for Renters of Color](#).

unaffordability and displacement. More than 15% of renter households overall are now behind on rent, and 29% of families with children.<sup>3</sup> 28% of renters have no or only slight confidence they will be able to pay next month's rent. Black and Latinx renters, who have been hardest hit by unemployment and COVID-19, are faring even worse: 40% of Black renters and 32% of Latinx renters have little to no confidence they can pay next month's rent. But rents are not falling. Anecdotally, we have heard reports from tenants of steep rent increases during the pandemic, perhaps driven by wealthier out-of-towners relocating to Connecticut.

**Rent control protects tenants from excessive rent increases by creating a schedule for reasonable and gradual rent increases that fairly compensate the property owner. It** provides immediate relief for tenants and promotes housing stability and affordability long-term.

**Rent control is also a critical tool to redress historical disinvestment in predominately Black and Latinx neighborhoods without displacing the families who live there and have been most harmed by decades of racial discrimination.** With rent control measures in place, cities can make investments in neighborhoods that have historically experienced disinvestment because of racial discrimination and redlining without risking that the rising property values that result will displace the families who already live there through increased rents and gentrification. Tenants can know that holding a landlord accountable for poor conditions won't result in skyrocketing rents and displacement. Rent control allows renters to stay in their homes and neighborhoods, even when they are experiencing gentrification, by keeping housing costs more affordable and with predictable increases.

Studies of cities that have enacted rent control laws show that it works to make housing affordable and stable, especially for low-income renters who have the least choice in the rental market and are most susceptible to rent-gouging, eviction, and displacement, and that it does not discourage new investments in housing.<sup>4</sup> Tenants living in rent-controlled units relocate less frequently and are less likely to be forced to move, and experience better physical, social, and psychological wellness overall.

H.B. 5685 would not require rent control but would give cities this option. We urge you to pass legislation reauthorizing the municipal use of rent control.

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<sup>3</sup> Census Bureau, Week 23 Household Pulse Survey: January 20 – February 1

<sup>4</sup> See Ameer Chew and Sarah Treuhart, Our Homes Our Future: How Rent Control Can Build Stable, Healthy Communities, available at <https://ourhomesourfuture.org/>.