

Dear Reps. McGee and Smith, Sens. Lopes and Anwar, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Ivan Albert. I am a resident of Norwalk, I am testifying in **support of Connecticut H.B. 6531 - An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings and H.B. 6528 - An Act Concerning the Sealing of Eviction Records.**

The idea that any layman can be shoved into the labyrinth of rules and statutes that is the American legal system without access to a guide is downright cruel. Doubly so when a roof over their head is on the line. There is very good reason why the right to council is guaranteed in other courts of law, and the fact that this doesn't include housing court is a wrong that you have an opportunity to right at the state level for the first time in US history. No matter what the context, if anyone finds a judge before them and a prosecution against them there needs to be a lawyer beside them.

Today in the state of Connecticut only 7% of tenants in eviction cases have legal representation as opposed to 80% of landlords. This should make abundantly clear how difficult it currently is for tenants to get access to these resources. As for the effectiveness of that council, having representation lowers the odds that a tenant appearing in court will be served removal orders from 44% to 21%. *This means that half of the tenants who are evicted in housing court without a lawyer have a valid case, but nobody to make it properly.* With H.B. 6531 we can fix that.

You're going to hear some stories about the woes of landlordism from people who haven't been discouraged by those woes enough to consider other investments. They may even try to convince you that these measures will lead to a housing crisis, as if the properties stop existing once they are sold. The reality of the matter is that we are facing a housing crisis now. More than 45,000 Connecticut residents are currently facing eviction once the moratorium ends. Many have had their lives turned upside down by the pandemic and its effects. Most will not have counsel when they step into housing court. Guaranteeing legal representation is the only way to *avoid* this housing crisis.

Even for those who are not evicted this will likely not end their troubles, as the mere fact that they were ever taken to housing court will follow them for years and cause them to be blacklisted and denied rentals *even if they win*. In what other part of our legal system can a ruling in your favor ruin your future prospects? This is why H.B. 6528 is necessary to seal eviction case records for eviction filings that do not rule in the landlord's favor.

These bills go hand in hand, one protecting tenants that win their day in court and the other ensuring that they come to court with proper representation. With them in place we can avoid the housing catastrophe awaiting us and ensure these residents are treated fairly by our legal system.

I strongly support H.B. 6531 and H.B. 6528 and urge you to favorably vote these bills out of the Housing Committee.

Sincerely,

Ivan Albert  
Norwalk