

TESTIMONY OF JAMES BHANDARY-ALEXANDER IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 6531

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

My name is James Bhandary-Alexander, and I work as the Legal Director of the Medical-Legal Partnership Program at the Solomon Center for Health Law and Policy at Yale Law School. I live in New Haven.

In my current role, I teach and supervise law students provide civil legal services to low-income patients in hospitals and clinics in New Haven. These services address underlying social determinants of poor health such as evictions, substandard housing conditions, unsafe workplaces, domestic violence, lack of immigration status, and the collateral consequences of incarceration. Previously, I was employed at New Haven Legal Assistance, where I represented low-income people facing difficulties in a variety of areas of law.

I want to testify from personal experience as a lawyer representing tenants in eviction cases about the importance of this representation. I have seen, first-hand, the stress and pain that tenants undergo during the eviction process. Because nine out of ten times tenants don't have lawyers, they usually go into these processes with little understanding of the procedure or substantive legal rules controlling the roof over their head. In the hyper-technical world of summary process eviction statutes, that can mean the difference between a tenant keeping their family housed, and health-harming homelessness. If you go to housing court anywhere in Connecticut, you will see the stress, the desperation, and the concern written all over the faces of thousands of your constituents who face this daunting situation every week.

We can do better and we must do better. H.B. 6531 provides a fighting chance, in the form of a lawyer, to every tenant in the state with a good defense, with an important story to share, and without the means to spend thousands of dollars on their own attorney. I urge your support.

Sincerely,

James Bhandary-Alexander