

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

My name is Ashley Donea Blount. I am a resident of New Haven. 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.

I've decided to testify because I have been to housing court with no legal representation & I have faced housing insecurity due to an old housing record with no clarity around the details of the case. I am not sure if you are aware but we are still in a state of crisis! As a Black Woman that has experienced housing insecurity outside of this pandemic I know this state is already fighting chronic homelessness and our state leadership has yet to put any plan in place to ensure CT residents are able to stay in their homes.

When my housing was threatened, it plagued my mental, physical, and emotional wellness. I remember not having anywhere to go when I was served with an eviction notice. Community members offered temporary spaces they had available like a small art room or a third floor bedroom. I felt deep embarrassment and shame moving from house to house with bags and bins filled with my belongings. Some nights I slept on couches or in my car because no space was permanent. Even after I secured stable work it took time to save up enough money to pay rent and security, leaving me employed but still homeless. Let me tell you -- no person would willingly face eviction, and deal with all the shame, stigma, and uphill struggles that accompany it, if they could afford to pay their rent. Right now, folks just can't pay. And if someone is unable to pay their rent, do you think they have resources to hire legal representation? After someone has endured an eviction process, do they have to suffer forever with a housing record looming over their heads?

Last year, my partner and I were looking for an apartment in the New Haven/ Hamden area. We decided if we could spend 6 months with each other in quarantine, living together and the opportunity to save money on bills would take little thought. We expected to compromise on whether or not her plants would take up every window in the house or if the 11 x 20 picture of my Mom would hang in the bedroom. What we did not expect to consider; who would be listed on the lease or the quality of the apartment. While apartment hunting, it was brought to my attention that I had a housing record that was haunting me from 5 years ago. Fortunately my partner and I remained employed throughout this crisis, with a double income household I figured we would have many

options to choose from around the city. However that was not the case at all, due to my housing record the apartments we were shown were less than subpar, broken stairways, rooms filled with supplies, broken furniture, and I think you get the point. It is a shame that we are making residents suffer and allow evictions to haunt them. Folks have very few options if they have an eviction record and generally it leads to a slumlord.

We all know this state has some issues with implementation, as currently this committee has \$247 million dollars for rental assistance. Do not let the residents down this time around, we are still in a crisis. Put policy in place that will support the people.

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

Sincerely,

[Ashley Blount](#)