

Dear Chairs McGee and Lopes, Vice-Chairs Smith and Anwar, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, and members of the Housing Committee,

My name is Deborah L Brody. I grew up in Newtown, CT, and am currently a resident of Southbury, CT. I am a Registered Nurse who has worked at North Hawaii Community Hospital, at Yale New Haven Hospital, in pediatric home care, and at Middlesex Hospital. I am a member of the Medical Reserve Corps at Pomperaug Health District, and a community health educator for the Western CT Area Agency on Aging.

I am testifying in support of

Connecticut **S.B. 194** - An Act Establishing a Right to Housing,

Connecticut **H.B. 6531** - An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings,

and

Connecticut **H.B. 6528** - An Act Concerning the Sealing of Eviction Records.

As a nurse, I have seen first hand the harm done to people by being unhoused or by being precariously housed: blindness and amputations due to diabetes and wounds going inadequately or inconsistently treated; teeth lost because of no dental care, along with all the consequent nutrition deficits from being unable to chew or afford dentures; and profound injuries to mental and social health. I'd like to add that people without housing, or with insecure housing, when they reach health care, it is through the emergency room, and we pay a hundred-fold for their suffering, which could have been entirely prevented if basic human needs had been met from the start. Starting with a secure and comfortable place to live.

I would also like to attest, from personal experience, how traumatic it is to be forced to leave a home. In my life this has happened twice. In both cases I lost a career and had to start over. In both cases my children were ripped from their schools and friends. In both cases we lost belongings – furniture given us by grandparents, books bought for my children. My sewing machine.

And these were not even evictions. We did not have to experience the social calumny and shame that is heaped upon people who are forcibly put out of their living space by an owner. My children did not have to stand frightened beside me as police marched in and started hauling our things out to the curb – something I did personally witness happening to a neighbor, when I lived in Cromwell. That is a sight, and sounds, I will never forget.

And my children and I did not have to fear that we would not be able to find or afford housing down the line, for years or even decades, because an eviction had put a black mark on our record and on my credit.

For us, when a shifting economy robbed me of employment, we had family there to house us for free, so that we could leave before it came to eviction, and we could live safely and comfortably as we got back on our feet.

Our *family* gave us the right to housing.

I do not doubt that every one of us would, to the best of our ability, give this same succor to anyone we cared about.

This is why we must give it to everyone.

Because there is not one of us who can live without a place to call home.

S.B. 194 embodies our moral commitment to meeting a fundamental human need for our brother, as we would wish it be met for ourselves or our loved ones.

H.B. 6531 is an *essential support* to meeting this need, because it guarantees that in any dispute between a landlord and a tenant, BOTH sides will have equal access to legal representation and a fair hearing in court. This measure will help landlords of good faith and good will to reach equitable resolutions with their tenants – as I have read many landlords testifying to this hearing that they desire. In New York City alone, the institution of tenant right to counsel resulted in 77% fewer evictions each year, which translates into 77% fewer interruptions of occupancy. May I also add something from my experience in nursing – when people know that they are on an equal footing with you, they are MUCH less likely to act destructively. In nursing, it is listening and attending to what the patient says that creates this rapport of equality and collaborative problem-solving, and the result is better, and less costly, outcomes. In housing, I believe that both sides knowing that they are meeting as equals, with equal access to the law, will have the same effect, and translate into LESS cost for landlords from carelessness or outright destruction to the property.

H.B. 6528 is also an *essential support* to meeting the universal and fundamental need for housing because it prevents people from being pushed into downward spirals to homelessness by indiscriminate blacklisting. The data aggregation services that landlords rely upon to assess tenants make no distinction between a judge ordered eviction for cause and an eviction filing that was withdrawn, dismissed, or even decided in the tenant's favor. This means that people are being denied housing often on grounds that the prospective landlord themselves does not realize are spurious. **H.B. 6528** will resolve this by selectively sealing only the records of

eviction filings that did not result in a judgement for the landlord. This is fair. Landlords will still be able to know if a tenant was found to be destructive of property, or irretrievably delinquent in rent. At the same time, landlords will not be turning away good tenants based on bad data.

If we are sincere in valuing human life and dignity we must pass **S.B. 194** - An Act Establishing a Right to Housing.

If we are sincere that housing is a human right, we must implement it by passing **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.

And lastly, if we are sincere that we wish to save public money, we must implement all three of these bills. In New York, San Francisco, Newark, Cleveland, Baltimore, Philadelphia, and Boulder, the cost to the public purse of homelessness has been demonstrated to be as much as 12 times what it costs to fund Tenant Right to Counsel – which is the only one of these three bills that requires a funding allocation.

As a person, a mother, a Registered Nurse, a past tenant, a potential future landlord, and as a taxpayer, I beg you to vote **S.B. 194, H.B. 6531, and H.B. 6528** favorably from this committee.

Thank you all for your time.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Brody, RN
Southbury, CT