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West Hartford Resident
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My name is Pearson Caldwell, and I have lived in the greater Hartford area for nearly 10 years. As a former tenant who has suffered stolen rental deposits, absent landlords, and apartments in disrepair, I have personally felt the power imbalance between landlords and tenants. While I have not had to face an eviction, the situations I did live through made it clear to me just how much power landlords really have, compared to how little power tenants have.

The right to counsel and eviction sealing bills being heard today represent a real opportunity to give tenants more power in the devastating eviction process. This year, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and racial injustices across the country, tenants need this protection now, more than ever.

Despite the state and federal moratoriums on eviction, nearly 3,000 Connecticut families have faced eviction in the past 10 months. Over half of these families were Black or Latinx, even though these groups combined comprise less than a quarter of the overall population.

In Connecticut, less than 7 percent of tenants facing eviction have legal counsel, compared to over 80 percent of landlords. Connecticut has been in a housing crisis for years, with four cities ranking in the top 100 urban eviction rates. The COVID-19 pandemic has only made matters worse: over 45,000 tenants are expected to face evictions once the current eviction moratorium expires.

When we talk about an eviction crisis, we are talking about a racial justice crisis. Black and Latinx households are up to two times more likely to face an eviction than white households. Let that sink in: for every one eviction filed against a white family, more than two families of color have evictions filed against them. Black women and women of color especially bear the burden of evictions. An ACLU study found that women of color made up 70 percent of tenants facing eviction.

Beyond the loss of housing, evictions cause homelessness, negative physical and mental health outcomes, disruption in children's schooling, and increased exposure to COVID-19 and other diseases. Any record of an eviction also acts as a scarlet letter for tenants, making it difficult to secure stable housing in the future.

With right to counsel legislation, Connecticut has a meaningful chance to curb the housing and eviction crisis. Seven cities across the country have implemented right to counsel legislation, and they have seen incredible results: In San Francisco, which enacted right to counsel in 2018, two-thirds of represented tenants stayed in their homes. In New York City, which enacted right to counsel in 2017, 86% of represented tenants stayed in their homes and there was a 77% decrease in the number of cases that resulted in a warrant for eviction. Philadelphia found that tenants with legal representation avoided displacement 95% of the time, compared to only 22% of unrepresented tenants.

In addition to the benefit of keeping tenants in their homes, right to counsel legislation saves the state money. Evictions add pressure to the shelter system, the foster care system, emergency rooms, and can cause other externalities like homelessness and crime. For every dollar spent on right to counsel, states have saved between \$2.40 and \$12.74.

Right to counsel legislation will not only help prevent evictions, but also make a huge difference for communities of color. The eviction crisis is a racial justice crisis, and right to counsel legislation provides one of the most immediate tools to generate positive change.

Thank you.