

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

My name is Timothy Gabriele. I am a resident of North Haven, CT and I am testifying to express my strong support for HB 6531, An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings.

Right to no cost legal counsel exists as a constitutionally protected right in criminal cases, but in eviction cases, that protection does not currently exist. Most people facing eviction go unrepresented. In Connecticut, 80 percent of landlords have representation in eviction cases, while only 7 percent of tenants do. Right to counsel legislation guarantees the same right to no cost representation in eviction cases as criminal cases.

Several cities have implemented right to counsel legislation, and they have seen real results. In New York City, a study showed that providing legal counsel to tenants was associated with a [77% decrease](#) in the number of cases that resulted in a warrant for eviction.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, this work takes on new urgency. When the eviction moratorium ends, [nearly 40,000 Connecticut residents are expected to face eviction](#), and without representation in those cases, tenants will struggle to avoid losing their housing, in the middle of a global pandemic with regular bouts of extreme weather pummeling the state. Evictions are now, more than ever, a matter of life and death. Even where evictions do not threaten physical health, the mental health effects of being unhoused and essentially discarded by the state is deleterious, particularly to children.

Economic devastation can happen at any time and it is not the result of a moral failing. Many who face evictions are willing to pay but simply unable to because they have been the victim of unfortunate circumstances. Generational poverty, which exists in far greater numbers among racial minorities, makes one even more susceptible to the ebbs and tides of economic misfortune and hence more prone to housing displacement. I believe the purpose of a society is to ensure that everyone is guaranteed a right to basic necessities, such as shelter from the elements. This means that we should begin taking steps as a society to ensure that housing is a human right. But even if you disagree, it seems that one of the basic foundations of the United States is the guarantee of equal protection under law. We need to afford all Connecticut residents the access to justice that they deserve.

I hope the committee and Connecticut lawmakers agree that HB-6531 is due for a vote. I strongly support its passage. I thank the committee for their time.

Sincerely,
Timothy Gabriele
North Haven, CT