

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

Thanks for your attention today. My name is Sarah Ganong, and I'm a resident of Hartford and the Campaigns Director for Connecticut Working Families. My testimony is in strong 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.

Connecticut Working Families is a statewide organization that fights for an economy that works for everyone and a democracy where every voice matters. We know that the COVID pandemic has exacerbated many families' struggles to keep food on their tables and the roof over their heads. During that time, guaranteeing tenants the right to legal representation during eviction proceedings, and protecting tenants from eviction blacklisting, feels like the least we can do to defend and protect Connecticut families.

Even before the pandemic, Connecticut had one of the highest rates of urban evictions in the entire country, with four of our cities (Waterbury, Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven) ranking in the top 100 in the nation. Here at CT Working Families, we know that evictions are a racial justice issue -- Black women with children experience some of the highest rates of eviction. And here in Connecticut, the vast majority of landlords have legal representation in evictions, while the vast majority of tenants do not. Limited free legal help and exorbitant fees from private lawyers keep legal support out of reach for most tenants facing eviction. But increased funding isn't enough -- we must guarantee legal representation as a right for tenants.

Right to counsel doesn't just help tenants stay in their homes, although data overwhelmingly supports that it does. It also saves the state money and prevents the disruption caused by evictions, from keeping children in the same school to preventing tenants from losing jobs or income. Tenants deserve justice, and representation, in eviction proceedings. That is why I strongly support H.B. 6531 and H.B. 6528 and urge you to favorably vote these bills out of the Housing Committee.

All best,

Sarah