

March 3, 2021

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

My name is Carolyn Graves. I am a resident of Bridgeport; 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 was a victim of predatory lending several years ago. I was brought to court to address my foreclosure. I used the internal mediation offered by the courthouse rather than pursuing legal counsel knowing it was something I probably could not afford. It happened so quickly and I did not know what direction to go in as far as keeping or staying in the house. It was a heavy mental and emotional toll and I just walked away because I did not know where to go for real support. I made arrangements to leave. The court sent someone and told me we had to leave in 30 days. This experience caused a lot of emotional turmoil for my family and I would not want anyone to experience this if we as a community of taxpayers can help those in poverty have access to counsel and possibly avoid homelessness.

- Data from 2019 in Connecticut supports that having a lawyer makes a difference: ○ 44% of tenant cases without counsel led to removal orders, compared to 21% with counsel;
 - 28% of tenant cases without counsel led to landlord obtaining a judgment of possession for non-payment of rent, compared 3.4% with tenant counsel; and ○ the likelihood of a case being withdrawn more than doubled with tenant counsel
- Increased funding is not enough. We must guarantee legal representation as a right for tenants.
 - Funding can be reduced or eliminated over time
 - A right is enforceable and ensures that tenants will have legal representation, now and in the future, and that the state will prioritize funding for legal representation.

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

Sincerely,

Carolyn Graves
Bridgeport