

Dear members of the Housing Committee,

I am writing to express my support on House Bill 6531, an act concerning the right to counsel in eviction proceedings.

PBS Newshour recently did a story on Fairfield County Connecticut, specifically with the potential eviction and foreclosure tsunami residents in the area may be facing due to COVID-19. Due to no fault of their own people have had their lives turned upside down with layoffs, late unemployment checks, and an overwhelmed rental assistance program.

They are forced to navigate a legal system that they are completely unfamiliar with and often do not have the financial means to hire an attorney who knows how to be their guide. Much like in the criminal justice system having access to an attorney can make a huge difference in whether someone becomes homeless or not when it comes to dealing with evictions. According to the CT Fair Housing Center over the last three months 593 tenants came before a judge for an eviction hearing and only 28 of them had an attorney. Research has shown that for every dollar spent providing counsel to those potentially facing eviction, anywhere from \$2.40 to \$12.74 is saved by preventing people from becoming homeless and tapping emergency subsidies for a hotel or shelter and other safety net services. It also has the potential to reduce court caseloads because fewer evictions are being filed and more cases are being settled. Not to mention we are in the middle of a once in a century pandemic that spreads very quickly among populations which live in close quarters like homeless shelters. Why would we want to exacerbate a public health crisis like that?!

During this unprecedented time our state has an obligation to step up and create safety nets for our most vulnerable citizens. It sends out a message to our state's residents saying "It's okay if you stumble and fall, we are here to catch you. We care about you!" That's also a great way to attract more young people to our state since a government that takes care of its people is something they value deeply.

Thank you for your time,

Leanne Harpin
Fairfield CT