

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

My name is Callie Gale Heilmann. I am the President & Co-Director of Bridgeport Generation Now and a resident of Bridgeport, CT. Bridgeport Generation Now is a grassroots, member-based organization of Bridgeport resident dedicated to strengthening civic engagement in ourselves and our communities. We organize to end systemic racism and corruption in Bridgeport, so we can build a just, equitable, and livable city.

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. Connecticut already had some of the highest urban eviction rates in the country, with [four cities ranking in the top 100 evicting cities nationally](#): Waterbury, #22 and an eviction rate of 6.1%; Hartford, #29 with an eviction rate of 5.73%; Bridgeport, #39 and an eviction rate of 5.03%; and New Haven, #69 with an eviction rate of 4.05%.

As Matthew Desmond explains in *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, “eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty.” Once the eviction moratorium expires, more than 45,000 Connecticut residents expect to face eviction. Most will not have access to a lawyer. [Evictions destabilize lives](#) and are a [public health issue](#). Evictions cause [job loss](#) and homelessness, undermine childrens’ [education](#), [negatively impact physical](#) and [mental health](#) and limit access to decent housing in the future through [eviction blacklisting](#) by landlords and big data companies (even if the tenant won).

Finally, evictions are also a [racial justice issue](#). Black and Latinx families are twice as likely to have evictions filed against them as white families in Connecticut. Black women with children experience some of the [highest rates](#) of eviction.

In Connecticut, over 80% of landlords have legal representation in evictions, while less than 7% of tenants do. Most tenants who want or need legal assistance cannot get it. 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a judgment of possession for non-payment of rent, compared 3.4% with tenant counsel; and the likelihood of a case being withdrawn more than doubled with tenant counsel.

We must guarantee legal representation as a right for tenants. 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. Bridgeport Generation Now strongly supports H.B. 6531 and H.B. 6528 and urge you to favorably vote these bills out of the Housing Committee. Sincerely,

Callie Gale Heilmann
Bridgeport Generation Now, President & Co-Director