

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

My name is Grace Holleran. I am a resident of Bridgeport and 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**.

One of the ways the COVID-19 pandemic has most affected our communities is in the form of the current housing crisis. When the eviction moratorium lifts, more than 40,000 residents of Connecticut are expected to face eviction. This means more than 40,000 people potentially having housing insecurity or even losing housing in the midst of a highly contagious pandemic.

Legal representation and protecting tenants from being blacklisted due to past eviction cases (even if the tenant won the case or the case was dismissed) are two tangible ways to help Connecticut's most vulnerable populations. Black and Latine families are twice as likely to have evictions filed against them as white families in Connecticut, and Black women with children experience some of the [highest rates](#) of eviction.

Data from 2019 in Connecticut already shows that having a lawyer **does** prevent evictions. 44% of tenant cases without counsel led to removal orders, compared to 21% with counsel; 28% of tenant cases without counsel led to the landlord obtaining a judgment of possession for non-payment of rent, compared to 3.4% with tenant counsel; and the likelihood of a case being withdrawn more than doubled with tenant counsel.

While increased relief funding is always welcome, it is ultimately not enough. Funding can be reduced and eliminated over time, while a **right** to counsel 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. Both bills would implement structural change that would continue to benefit our community in the years to come.

In Connecticut, more than 80% of landlords have representation in evictions, while less than 7% of tenants do. This underlines the power dynamic between the two groups and makes a strong case for why we need to be providing extra support specifically for **tenants**.

Right to legal counsel is already a guarantee in criminal cases. Giving tenants the same right in housing court is simply the right thing to do, especially under the conditions of a pandemic. In addition, tenants shouldn't be prevented from securing housing due to their eviction record. I urge you to favorably vote H.B. 6531 and H.B. 6528 out of the Housing Committee.

Sincerely,  
Grace Holleran  
Bridgeport, CT