

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

My name is Alexander Kolokotronis. I am a resident of New Haven, a registered voter, a union member, a PhD candidate in political science at Yale University, and a tenant. 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**.

As a lifelong tenant, I have felt the power imbalance between landlords and myself, as well as between landlords and my family. Prior to arriving at Yale I attended K-12 public schools and public university in New York City. Issues of rent and housing insecurity were a concern for my friends, my peers, and the people I served in later jobs. Since arriving in New Haven in 2016, I have attended public hearings, canvassed for many hours, and I have found that housing insecurity is an issue of top concern among New Haven residents—and this was before the pandemic. Even as the issue of housing insecurity was one I had encountered from others, growing up in a middle class family, it was not an issue that deeply affected me. That was until my father died in 2013.

In the year leading up to my father's sudden death, we were subject to mounting pressures from our landlord. We had lived in the same apartment for fourteen years, with my parents consistently taking it upon themselves to conduct the kind of upkeep to our rental that one would typically expect landlords to conduct. My parents were never late on rent, and they cultivated a garden out front that gave joy to our neighbors. We had found and made a home, and we were by all means and measures "good tenants". Being "good tenants" did not prevent our landlord from becoming increasingly aggressive towards us and making mounting changes to our apartment. Changes that had never been made or even talked about in the preceding decade were suddenly being made all over the place. The garden we had tended and that had become a source of smiles and fraternal conversation in the neighborhood was now covered in mulch: with my parents and myself required to remove every plant and flower, and cut down the tree we had planted and seen grow since I was a young child. The living situation was becoming worrisome and eventually untenable, as my parents were infused with anxiety by the increasing visits from our landlord. My father then fell ill, and though ill, his death was sudden and a shock. Even in the midst of a prior worrisome situation, my parents did everything they were supposed to do: they were proactive and considering other housing options, seeing themselves as entering the next phase of their life into retirement, and even trying to frame the next step in their and our lives as an opportunity rather than a product of unfortunate new circumstances. Ultimately, with my father's death, this too was upended. Nothing about the situation felt like an opportunity, and everything felt tragic.

Over the course of a year I had gone from living in the same neighborhood I had went to public schools my entire life with a father who was a beloved teacher in the neighborhood high school, to suddenly no longer living in the same neighborhood I had roots in while trying to keep up with college classes and the new set of constantly changing circumstances facing my mother and I. Through all of this, we never once knew about tenant protections: what they were and how to

access them, and if they were even real. Looking back, I can see how Right to Counsel could have made a difference. Right to Counsel would have shifted the power dynamic and given us as tenants confidence in the face of being pressured to leave. Right to Counsel is the law that will make all other laws around tenant protections applied and enforced, allowing people to keep and remain in their homes.

Given that 93% of tenants lack representation in eviction proceedings in Connecticut, it is clear that what legal protections do exist are either unbeknownst to tenants, or, if known, tenants lack the resources to ensure these protections work for them. Right to Counsel changes this dynamic. It ensures that when protections are passed, they are made real. It ensures that no one is unable to protect themselves due to a lack of access to resources or lack of knowledge. If the principle of a right to an attorney is upheld in other legal proceedings, why should this principle not be applied to a scenario as impactful and potentially dire as an eviction? Study after study has found that evictions [destabilize lives](#) by causing [job loss and homelessness](#), [undermining a child's education](#), [negatively impact](#) a person's [physical](#) and [mental health](#), and reduce a person's access to future housing through [eviction blacklists](#). Right to Counsel means that if someone might face an eviction or an exorbitant rent increase they won't be able to pay, they will have legal support to advise them on their rights and defend their homes.

If we want the state of Connecticut to be livable for working class residents, then mechanisms must be put in place that allow people to have safe and secure living arrangements. We cannot expect to make progress on issues of jobs, education and health if we don't first make real headway in ensuring people have stable living situations. Right to Counsel may have made a very real difference during a difficult time in my life, and it surely will make a big difference today in Connecticut for those facing potential eviction and dire housing insecurity.

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

Sincerely,  
Alexander Kolokotronis  
New Haven, CT