

March 3, 2021

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

My name is Vanessa Liles. 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 am a member of PT Partners' Anti-Oppression Task Force and we work to eliminate systems of oppression for residents living in low-income public housing. In working with mothers who are single women and head-of-household we know of the challenges and pain that comes with poverty.

Several of our team have been affected by evictions over the years and these bills Connecticut H.B. 6531 and H.B. 6528 will help alleviate the oppression and potential threat of homelessness that creates cycles of trauma for many. The stories they have shared include:

- Residents who have been subject to eviction based on poor communication and lack of effort to subvert the eviction process by the housing authority - forcing evictions they cannot fight.
- Residents who have had to accept the judgement of the courts and because the housing authority always has counsel, have had no choice but to pay the fees demanded. Tenants have had to accept this and some have used any retirement funds they were able to contribute to; thereby, creating generational poverty because real tools for wealth-building are impossible.
- Sickness and lack of support, and counsel, during the eviction process has been exploited and used to pressure the tenant into the payment demanded.

Please, also consider the statewide data:

- 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  - the likelihood of a case being withdrawn more than doubled with tenant counsel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,

Vanessa Liles  
Bridgeport