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INTERNATIONAL UNION, UNITED AUTOMOBILE, AEROSPACE & AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT WORKERS OF AMERICA – UAW

Testimony of John Murphy on behalf of United Auto Workers Region 9A

Housing Committee Public Hearing Thursday, March 4, 2021

In support of: HB 6531: An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings

Good afternoon Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, ranking members Cicarella and Poletta and members of the Committee. My name is John Murphy and on behalf of United Auto Workers Region 9A, I'm here to testify in support of HB 6531: An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings.

The experience of most people who end up in Housing Court is bewildering and overwhelming, leading to adverse outcomes because they don't have the right to counsel. Tenants go to Housing Court often go to Housing Court without representation, facing high powered attorneys hired by the landlords. They are overmatched and don't understand the process, leading to eviction, homelessness and the destruction of families.

This has been a problem for years, and now that we have been ravaged by the COVID-19 epidemic, there is an epic number of evictions on the horizon when the executive order prohibiting evictions expires. Our UAW member attorneys in New York City were instrumental in securing the Right to Counsel, ensuring fair representation and education for tenants. Other major cities have adopted it as well. It has been extremely successful in stopping judgements against tenants, allowing families to stay in their homes. Right to Counsel in Housing Court should be replicated in Connecticut.

There is precedent for establishing Right to Counsel in Connecticut. When we spoke to Senator Martin Looney about HB 6531, he was supportive and told us about a pilot project that he helped establish in Waterbury to provide Right to Counsel in protective order cases. The pilot project was very successful and shows that Right to Counsel for Housing Court is viable.

This bill is a perfect use for some of Connecticut's share of the federal coronavirus relief funds. With the glut of prospective evictions at the end of the protective executive order, we need to

ramp up quickly to ensure our residents understand their rights and have fair representation to secure their homes for themselves and their families.

Connecticut can be the first entire state to protect their tenants. Please pass HB 6531 to help so many families living on the edge. Thank you.