

March 3, 2021

Housing Committee Hearing

Testimony from Abdul Osmanu

Good Morning Representative McGee and Smith, Senator Lopes and Anwar and Distinguished  
Members of the Committee of the Housing Committee

My name is Abdul Osmanu. I am a resident of Hamden 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. As someone whose parents act in the capacity of landlord by renting out the first floor of their multifamily home, I still find it common sense and of the utmost importance to provide this vital assistance that will give tenants the ability to defend themselves. No matter how you theorize or cut it there is a currently a concerning gap in power and resources in the case of tenants being able to defend themselves from the prospect of evict. The institutional tools at the disposal of a landlord dwarf those available to tenants to defend themselves from an eviction process that heavily favors landlords. Such a power imbalance should simply not exist when discussing an issue that has such a profound ability to negatively effect on homelessness, finding future housing, and the children of evicted tenants. Passing these two bills would give the more than 93% of tenants without legal representation the opportunity to be adequately represented as one should be when staring at the aforementioned grave consequences that often accompany evictions. It is evident that the effects could be lifechanging for many tenants as with legal representation (that most tenants usually are unable to afford) and a more even playing field, only 21% of tenant cases result in a removal order. We live in a country where we operate on the presumption of innocence and provide legal

counsel to those held in criminal court, there is no reason why the same should not apply to those facing evictions. In addition to remedying this power imbalance, it would be almost impossible to deny how necessary a Right to Counsel for tenants is as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic that has put many tenants out of work and hanging on the mercy of monthly extensions of the CT eviction moratorium that has done nothing to stop many landlords from evicting their tenants. Once these moratoriums expire, there will be an upwards of 45,000 residents facing evictions, making an eviction/housing crisis, that much more of a possibility. As touched on earlier in mentioning the consequences of eviction, this housing crisis easily would snowball into even more crises such as a health crisis for those that become homeless and a crisis in education for the children of those that no longer have a permanent home. Amidst a global pandemic that continues to tear through vulnerable, working-class black and brown communities and leaves many facing evictions, I find the passage of H.B. 6531 and 6528 to be at least the bare minimum the state can do for our communities that have. If nothing substantial is done, handling the consequences of mass eviction will cost us societally and monetarily in contrast to guaranteeing a Right to Counsel for Tenants that affirms the humanity of our most vulnerable, powerless residents.

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

With Love and Solidarity,

Abdul Osmanu

Hamden