

Dear Rep. Lemar, Sen. Looney, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Will Riley Robbins. I am a resident of New Haven; 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.

Toward the end of last March, my partner and I received a call from our property manager notifying us that our rent was to increase 20% on our next lease. I thought there must be some sort of law against such an egregious increase, there is not in Connecticut. I ended up speaking to a few of the other tenants in our building and found out that they too would be hit with anywhere from a 20-25% increase. We decided to fight it together. We sent our complaint to the New Haven Fair Rent Commission. How could they do this in normal times- much less during a pandemic!? We were hit with a number of different shady tactics by our management company meant to divide us, make us feel alienated and uncertain, exasperated and desperate. We were told we were acting “unethically” because we made this informal tenant union among the residents of our building. I don’t think I have ever gasped such a gasp when I was told this. Long story short, we were able to come to an agreement where we would keep paying the same rent as the previous year. A few of the other tenants moved out. Their apartments are all pricey Airbnb’s now.

We were very lucky to form our own little community of support during an otherwise awful process happening the early days of a pandemic that would really teach us how absolutely vital it is to have stable housing. After loss of work and uncertain prospects, we would not have been able to pay the increase if it were allowed. We barely get by as it is now. I know that many people are facing evictions for unpaid rent as soon as the moratorium ends here in CT and across the country. Pro bono services are not equipped for the coming flood of eviction cases. Public housing is inadequate on this scale. CT needs to immediately implement right to counsel for people facing eviction. Having a decent home is one of the most basic human rights and we know from countless data that once someone loses their home, most outcomes become bleak. People facing eviction in the coming months will not be able to afford legal services and having guaranteed representation in criminal trials is one of the things that helps keep our courts just. It would be criminal to not provide representation to the large swath of people facing impending evictions. Please do the right thing, thank you.

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

Very Sincerely Yours,
Will R. Robbins
New Haven