

Dear Chair Lopes and Chair McGee, Vice Chair Anwar, Vice Chair Smith, Ranking Member Cicarella, Ranking Member Polletta, and Distinguished Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Housing Committee:

My name is Reed Schwartz, and I am a Middletown resident and Policy Director for the Wesleyan Democrats. I am writing to urge members of the committee to support H.B. 6531, An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings and S.B. 194, An Act Establishing a Right to Housing. Both of these bills would, in part, contribute to forwarding the goal of housing equity in Connecticut, by providing representation to those who cannot afford and preventing unjust evictions and by affirming the state's commitment to shelter for all its residents.

As a San Francisco native, I've seen firsthand the impact that skyrocketing rent can have on vulnerable communities. We've only just begun to address our self-imposed shortage by taking steps such as legalizing ADUs and trying (unsuccessfully so far!) to legalize duplexes, but Connecticut has the chance to learn from our mistakes and avoid the destruction inherent to exclusionary restrictions on construction. On the other hand, our tenant right to counsel legislation has been a core part of ameliorating the displacement caused by sky-high costs of living, and has been a meaningful investment in our communities.

It is deeply unfortunate that the US Supreme Court has declined to extend the guarantee enshrined in the constitution to legal defense to civil cases. Connecticut should absolutely take the opportunity to extend the protections of *Gideon v. Wainwright* to tenants statewide, as other progressive jurisdictions have already done with great success. Universal right to counsel, even without income caps, heavily benefits the most vulnerable¹ and prevents an enormous amount of human suffering (as well as strain on our social services) by reducing displacement and, downstream, houselessness.

As is, I am strongly in support of the provisions of H.B. 6531, as well as the values demonstrated in S.B. 194. However, I am also aware that the two together do not go nearly far enough in affecting housing affordability or the climate catastrophe accelerated by the construction of inefficient and exclusionary suburbs.² In addition to the legalization of ADUs, in the interest of reducing the state's carbon footprint and addressing some part of its legacy of redlining and segregation, I would also like to see a large-scale reduction in local control over new development (especially designated affordable development), statewide zoning floors guaranteeing construction of up to four stories statewide and up to ten stories along transit corridors, the elimination of the racist policy^{3,4} of single family zoning through universal legalization of fourplexes, and the elimination of parking minimums.⁵

¹ <https://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2019/0730/Meet-the-eviction-defenders-helping-to-keep-tenants-at-home>

² <https://news.berkeley.edu/2014/01/06/suburban-sprawl-cancels-carbon-footprint-savings-of-dense-urban-cores/>

³ <https://www.kqed.org/news/11840548/the-racist-history-of-single-family-home-zoning>

⁴ <https://www.psychousing.org/news/ct-makes-list-most-segregated-school-districts-nation>

⁵ <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2018/05/01/youre-no-climate-mayor-if-youre-not-doing-these-four-things/>

For these reasons, I humbly request and encourage all members of the Connecticut General Assembly to vote for HB-6531 and SB-194, but would like to see them used as a starting point and not as an end in themselves.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Reed Schwartz

reschwartz@wesleyan.edu