

## Testimony of The Connecticut Coalition Of Property Owners (CCOPO)

In front of the Housing Committee March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Good afternoon Representative McGee, Senator Lopes, Representative Smith, Senator Anwar, Senator Cicarella and all other esteemed members of the housing committee. My name is John Souza and I volunteer as President of the CT Coalition of Property Owners and I'm a full-time landlord. The Connecticut Coalition Of Property Owners (CCOPO) is one of Connecticut's largest landlord/property owner organizations. CCOPO has chapters in Enfield, Windham, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Norwich and Stamford, as well as the CT Association of Real Estate Investors (CAREI) in West Hartford. Our members own thousands of rental units throughout Connecticut, consisting of mostly small and mid-sized landlords.

For over 20 years, CCOPO has been a constructive voice for responsible landlords on such issues as: nuisance abatement, bedbugs and domestic violence. We are here to represent the mom-and-pop small businesspeople that provide a valuable and much needed service. Most of us are residents of the towns we serve and just ask to be treated fairly in any proposed legislation.

**Conditionally Support** SB48 *An Act Concerning Additional Housing Protections For Victims Of Family Violence Or Sexual Assault*. (change the locks.) SUPPORT with minor changes to allow up to 1 business day to respond (it's not clear what "receipt of the request" means. Is an email sent the request or is it when I as the landlord opens it the beginning of the 6 hours?) and 2 business days to replace the locks. Many landlords already change locks for a nominal fee when necessary but, please remember property owners are often at the mercy of contractors to perform such tasks.

**OPPOSE** HB 6528 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SEALING OF EVICTION RECORDS.

Why does the state feel landlords should bear the burden of increased loss of rent? Please remember all increases in expenses will eventually be passed to the tenants in the form of higher rents. Eviction cases are public record and should be accessible for determination of suitability for tenancy. **A potential tenant who applies for an apartment and is presently under eviction will not show up in the screening** if the records are sealed during the process. It will encourage bad tenants to continue with their unscrupulous behavior. The state already deletes eviction records after several years in their computer systems. Allowing parties to agree to the ability to permanently seal cases will only serve to encourage every defendant to not agree to anything unless the case is sealed permanently.

**OPPOSE 6531 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO COUNSEL IN EVICTION PROCEEDINGS.**

The vast majority of evictions in the state are for nonpayment of rent. If the state wants to help alleviate the amount of evictions, they should use the monies it would cost to hire the additional lawyers to represent the tenants, for housing assistance programs. The summary process (housing court) in Ct operates with help of housing mediators that craft agreements between landlord and tenant. Tenants already get a second chance to pay timely and catch up on the back rents owed with these agreements. Delaying the process is the likely outcome when more lawyers are involved, and the landlord is likely to lose more money, as the product we sell is “time”. All additional costs to the property owner will eventually translate into higher rents.

**OPPOSE SB 355 ACT CONCERNING A LANDLORD'S ABILITY TO CONSIDER THE CRIMINAL RECORD OF PROSPECTIVE TENANTS.**

CCOPO understands the need to support the formerly incarcerated. Any proposed policies should not punish landlords who take reasonable steps and act in good faith to protect other innocent tenants, their families, and communities. The Lookback period should be 10 years for a covered felony or misdemeanor, starting from the date of release from confinement. Since we cannot see into the hearts of formerly incarcerated persons, **evidence of good behavior after release** is the only criteria, we as property owners can assess and is critical to protecting many innocent young and or disabled existing tenants. Without the ability to see patterns of behavior the public safety will be at risk. Just because someone is poor doesn't mean they don't deserve to live in a safe building. The state has the ability to expunge the records of deserving justice involved persons already and the process includes a commission or board that examines the behavior of the offender post release, to ensure they have changed their ways. Why not just expand on that program?

Even the State requires evidence of good behavior before granting criminal record erasure, property owners should be allowed to do the same.

**Neutral SB 194 An Act Establishing A Right to Housing.** To establish a right to housing for all residents of the state.

We applaud the vision of the lofty goal to create a housing system that leaves no one behind. CCOPO members have strived to provide low and moderate cost housing to residents of the State with little or no cost to the taxpayers, for many years. Even as barriers to our success have continued to rise. We simply want to remind the legislators to provide full funding for this type of public benefit, to not place new burdens on already struggling property owners' shoulders. Many of the solutions you seek could be found by changing the eviction system, to diminish the great risk landlords take when renting

to marginal applicants. We would be happy to assist in inspiring the creation of more housing, which is the only true way to alleviate the needs of many underserved populations. With the creation of positive changes in the business climate for housing providers we can become a partner to find creative solutions to house everyone.

Lastly, the right to housing committee that would be created by this bill should include a landlord or property manager and an attorney that represents property owners in court.

**Support SB 356 *An Act Establishing An Energy Efficiency Retrofit Grant Program For Affordable Housing.***

To require the Department of Housing to establish a housing energy efficiency retrofit program. Grants and loans for LLC's to upgrade building systems. Anything that saves monies for property owners will help keep housing more affordable.

**Support SB 49 An Act Increasing Opportunities For Workforce Housing Development In The State.**

This bill, while complicated and maybe expensive, is a positive way to support development of more low-cost housing in the state. The only way to solve the housing problems in this state is to encourage the building of enough buildings that property owners will compete for tenants. Competition creates opportunity for anyone to access low or moderate cost housing. When you as a landlord have empty units, you consider all and every option to fill the space.

**OPPOSE SB 87 AN ACT CONCERNING PROTECTIONS FOR CERTAIN GROUP CHILD CARE AND FAMILY CARE HOMES.**

- \* This bill violates a landlord's basic right to control their property.
- \* It also removes from local town control any input as to what may take place within its' borders.
- \* It creates a financial burden by not allowing surcharges of increased utilities!
- \* Will disturb other tenants right to quiet enjoyment of the property.
- \* With Purposed strict liability for lead (SB 874 see testimony below) and required lead tests of the premises it sounds as you are requiring landlords to commit financial suicide. Why not encourage daycare providers to buy and renovate appropriate buildings to run a daycare from?

**Oppose** SB 874 AN ACT CONCERNING THE PERMITTING AND SAFETY OF RENTAL UNITS.

Please remove Lines 151 to 153 that would impose strict liability upon landlords for lead damages.

The lead issue is a complicated matter and establishing strict liability for landlords is an unfair burden when a majority of the housing stock in CT was built before 1978 when lead was legal and often encouraged to be used in building products. As the standards for allowable lead in blood tighten, little has been discussed regarding other sources of lead or other locations that may cause or contribute to the problem. Today, lead has been found in many consumer products, cheap jewelry, vinyl window blinds, toys etc. even though it was banned from paint use 40 years ago.

\*This bill would promote "strict liability" lawsuits in lead poisoning cases even though the number of cases and levels of lead in blood have been dropping for many years. **Lawsuits increases the costs associated with housing and does not promote or encourage affordable solutions to this complicated problem.**

**\*Consider increasing loan/ grant programs to remediate lead cases when the need arises.**

Thank you for your time.

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