

Dear Reps. McGee and Smith, Sens. Lopes and Anwar, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Henry Walton. I am a resident of Ridgefield, 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.

I am incredibly fortunate - I have rarely been housing insecure in my life. I know this is an enormous privilege; housing insecurity is one of the leading causes for illness, mental health issues, ability to cope with stress, degradation of social relationships, elevated blood pressure, respiratory conditions, exposure to infectious disease, substance abuse, poor school performance, increased risk of teen pregnancy, and lower overall health levels in adulthood. Grade-school children with more than 2 school moves are 2.5 times more likely to repeat a grade, and adolescents who experience school moves are 50% more likely not to graduate from high school.

The one period in which I was housing insecure in my life was during a campaign deployment to Florida in early 2020. It was the worst three weeks of my adult life, the stress was enormous and living out of my car was degrading. Going to work became an exercise in fear as I did not know where I would call home that night. No tenant should face eviction in the current pandemic environment (or after) without access to legal counsel that can protect their rights. It is unconscionable that in Connecticut we do not give our renters and tenants basic legal support when facing eviction and this must change.

It is also shocking that we have not taken steps to Right to Counsel when it is also cost-saving to the state and municipalities. Evicting people creates enormous stress on social safety nets, schools, and our communal resources. Giving people adequate protection in the legal system when facing eviction is ultimately a move towards protecting human dignity, the right to call a safe environment home, and our collective support systems.

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

Sincerely,

Henry Walton  
Ridgefield