

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

My name is Brooke Williams. 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.

I strongly support this bill as someone with a personal background working in legal service. I served as a paralegal for tenants facing eviction in New York City, and I have had the unique opportunity to see first-hand the benefit of Right to Counsel legislation there. The chaotic and multi-faceted processes of Housing Court and the notices written in inaccessible legal jargon, all mean that everyday people are not able to defend themselves, even if they have legitimate legal arguments against their eviction. Without a lawyer, housing court is not what is it intended to be: it is not an arena where all the facts can be analyzed according to the law, rather, it is just a formality where landlords' attorneys can bulldoze through proceedings and never have their violations (failure to provide adequate notice to tenant, harassment, lack of vital repairs) brought to light.

Through my work I have met many, many people who are threatened by eviction: they are families with young children. They are long-time residents of their communities. They are disabled, elderly, immuno-compromised – and yet they are still threatened with homelessness during the deadliest pandemic the contemporary world has seen.

In addition to this experience in legal service, I also studied Public Policy and Law at Trinity College here in CT – and was named as the President's Fellow in Public Policy. I don't say this to brag, but only to demonstrate that I know what constitutes a legitimate economic analysis, and what separates shoddy and misleading statistics from the facts. And believe me, the financial analysis done regarding the benefits of this legislation speaks volumes. This bill would save the lives of vulnerable tenants, while also saving the state money: an unprecedented surge in demand for state shelter space in the wake of 45,000 evictions, during a pandemic where CDC guidelines must still be maintained, will not be a cheap invoice for the state of CT.

Every legislator who has weaponized budget deficits against policies meant to support our neighbors in time of need, must show their support for this bill, or be codified in our state's history as not only a hypocrite, but downright hostile to the needs of our most vulnerable families.

Truly, the alternative to RTC is for families to lose their homes, for young children to be fed into the already over-crowded shelter system... all on the dime of us CT taxpayers, footing the bill for the immiseration of our neighbors. For all of these above reasons, I strongly support H.B. 6531 and H.B. 6528 and urge you to favorably vote these bills out of the Housing Committee.

Sincerely,

Brooke Williams
New Haven