



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING CENTER

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. My name is Erin Kemple. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center (hereinafter “the Center”). The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a private non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all Connecticut residents have access to the housing of their choice. To accomplish this mission, the Center assists clients by addressing fair housing, fair lending, and homeowner rights through investigating claims of discrimination and the provision of legal representation, working with state and local governments to ensure that they fulfill their obligations under the fair housing laws, promoting integration, and stabilizing neighborhoods through foreclosure and eviction prevention.

I would like to begin by thanking Governor Lamont for recommending that the State maintain its support for the Center in the proposed 2022-23 biennium budget. After releasing his biennium budget, Governor Lamont commendably [acknowledged](#) that State policy must be guided by the essential core value of making progress towards social justice and equity. By supporting the Center, the State has demonstrated its commitment to this core value with a commitment to supporting antiracist work.

In 2020, Center staff witnessed the disparate impact the COVID-19 crisis has had on people of color, people with disabilities, and families with children. With the help of our Board and staff, the Center created a new program to respond to the pandemic in a way that addresses

the discrimination and segregation that resulted from decades of discriminatory housing policy. Staff responded to every person who remotely contacted our organization seeking solutions to their housing instability, while at the same time evaluating the systems that caused the person to need our help. This two-tiered effort helped the Center rise as a statewide leader advocating for equitable pandemic recovery to ensure that people of color and people who are low-income are not deprived of rental assistance and access to justice that they need to keep their homes .

The Center's accomplishments over the last year included:

- Answering 1,322 (35% increase from 2019) calls from households seeking assistance with a foreclosure, housing discrimination, or eviction case;
- Completing 555 investigations to determine if there was evidence of fair housing violations;
- Assisting 54 households in obtaining relief in the form of a reasonable accommodation, obtaining a unit that had been denied, or monetary damages;
- Filing 22 (175% increase over 2019) new cases in court or with an administrative forum;
- Assisting 245 households who were in foreclosure;
- Obtaining relief for 39 homeowners;
- 24 households receiving individual legal representation in their foreclosure cases;
- Providing more than 100 hours of short advice to 105 homeowners in foreclosure at Volunteer Attorney Panel tables in 7 courthouses before the pandemic shut the courthouses on March 10;
- Representing or giving legal advice to 35 homeowners in foreclosure at the Judicial Department's Attorney for Short Calendar program in Hartford and New Haven before the courthouses closed on March 10;
- Sending postcard notices to 919 homeowners in foreclosure notifying them that they could sign up for an appointment with one of the Center's attorneys to get advice about their foreclosure case;
- In August, creating a program for people in foreclosure to get short advice by meeting remotely with a Center staff member attended by 27 homeowners;
- Reaching 2,868 (52% increase over 2019) people through 44 fair housing education classes and trainings on housing issues related to the public health emergency;
- Distributing 873 Moving Forward Guides for Renters and Homebuyers in English and Spanish;
- Speaking with 2,080 people about fair housing at fairs, conferences, and festivals;
- Handing out 372 pieces of fair housing literature;
- Sending 80 updates on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on our clients to more than 6,000 people each time;
- Publishing and distributing factsheets for renters and homeowners on the effect of the pandemic on their legal rights, the court processes, evictions, lockouts, leases, and fair

housing protections as well as on the eviction moratoriums and rental assistance programs;

- Including information on COVID-19 rental assistance programs and the rights of people with disabilities on the Center's website;
- Creating a rent recalculation tool for use by tenants in subsidized housing to request a recalculation of their rent due to loss of income;
- Opening cases for 372 households facing eviction or loss of housing due to nonpayment of rent;
- Stopping the move out of a tenant who was COVID+;
- Participating in weekly meetings with tenants organizers working throughout Connecticut to plan and carry out direct outreach to renters impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, including renters facing eviction executions.
- Participating in more than 25 meetings with legal services advocates to plan a response to the COVID-19 crisis;
- Creating a database for all summary process eviction and foreclosure filings in Connecticut courts by subscribing to and downloading data from the Connecticut Judicial Branch's website;
- Using the database to notify the Governor's office, the Department of Housing, other state and local officials, and housing advocates of the rising number of summary process eviction and foreclosure cases that were being filed and/or where tenants were moved out of their homes;
- Met with DOH, the Governor's Office, HUD, and other housing advocates every other week to address the ongoing pandemic and its effect on access to housing.

Thank you for your past support and your commitment to advancing racial equity. We look forward to continuing to work with the State of Connecticut to ensure equitable access to safe, affordable housing.