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February 16, 2009

The Honorable Gayle Slossberg  
Co-chair– Government Administration and Elections Committee  
Connecticut General Assembly

Dear Senator Slossberg:

As a member of the Citizen's Advisory Council on Housing Matters, I am surprised and saddened by the Governor's Bill H.B. 6375-An Act Concerning Review and Termination of Certain Boards and Commissions which proposes to eliminate the Citizen's Advisory Council for Housing Matters and other boards and commissions as a cost-saving initiative for the next biennial budget. In the state of Connecticut affordable housing is one of the greatest challenges we face. At a time when we also face the greatest housing crisis of our generation, it would seem to me that this also a time when it is imperative to ensure the rights of the citizens of Connecticut to decent and fair housing. One need not look further than recent headlines to understand that tenants and homeowners alike have suffered as a result of housing foreclosures. Tenants who have paid their rent consistently and on time have found themselves facing foreclosure procedures with little more than a week's notice by bank that have taken over the property and does not want to be bothered with tenants. It is also a continuous struggle to enforce building codes that ensure safe and healthy living conditions for families due to inadequate numbers of housing code enforcement personnel and other challenges. It is also a challenge to educate law enforcement officers to understand housing law and their responsibilities when it comes to the protection of tenants' rights. Finally, it is imperative that when people find themselves in housing court that they are treated with respect and dignity, and that the facilities, the personnel, and the procedures that are required to utilize reflect this right to dignity and respect regardless of whether they are a tenant or landlord, whether they are rich or poor, and whether or not English is their native language.

The Citizen's Advisory Council on Housing Matters has been an effective advocate for both tenants and landlords and an effective monitor of housing court processes and procedures giving valuable feedback to judicial administrators and to the General Assembly (through its biennial reports). There is little cost to this committee other than the value placed upon the time and energy of committee members, court personnel and other interested parties who attend and participate in the meetings. Not only will the elimination of this committee not provide any savings to the state budget, it will greatly impair the participation of concerned citizens in the judicial administrative process and leave us without a voice in ensuring that housing courts remain accessible and responsive to the citizens they are created to serve. I am therefore asking you as a member of the leadership of the Government Administration and Elections committee to oppose H.B. 6375 by endorsing the continuation of the Citizen's Advisory Council on Housing Matters and re-affirming the General Assembly's commitment to its goals. Thank you very much for your consideration. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Patricia W. Walker, Ed.D.