Peter Goselin, People's Bailout Connecticut
Statement in Opposition to Proposed Legislation Affecting Tenants' Rights
(S.B. 373, H.B. 5538, and H.B. 5871)
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My name is Peter Goselin and I am the coordinator for the Connecticut chapter of the National Lawyers Guild. I am also a volunteer organizer for People's Bailout Connecticut, an organization dedicated to the proposition that in this economic crisis it is the working people and poor people of Connecticut who need and deserve to be bailed out, not Wall Street or the banks.

I am here today to speak against proposed anti-tenant legislation that is an attack on the rights of working people in a time of crisis and that must be rejected. I am referring to S.B. 373, H.B. 5538, and H.B. 5871, each of which in one fashion or another relieve cities and towns of the responsibility to store the possessions of evicted tenants for a period of time.

In the midst of a crippling economic crisis that may prove as bad as or worse than the Great Depression of the 1930's, some interest groups have not lost an opportunity to be heard. Corporate CEO's, bankers, the auto industry executives and others who played a major role in causing this economic crisis have also been the first to the podium to tell us why they should be bailed out for conduct that at best reflects egregiously bad judgment and at worst criminal misconduct.

In contrast, we have heard little from those who are the real victims of this crisis: working class people who are struggling to make a living, provide for their families, and especially keep a roof over their heads.

These are the people who stand to be harmed by the proposed legislation. Being evicted from your home is a traumatic event in the best of times. Today, as working people face the prospect of double digit unemployment across the country and including Connecticut, the trauma of being put on the street is particularly great. Families facing eviction or who are in foreclosure reasonably fear that their next address will be a car or a shelter.

The law as it exists requires the personal property left behind by an evicted tenant to be held by the city or town for at least fifteen days. The proposed legislation either leaves that property in the hands of the landlord or accomplishes the same outcome by making no provision for the storage of the property. Landlords who have been through eviction proceedings with a tenant are all too likely to immediately throw out the tenant's belongings. They may even engage in self-help and attempt to extort money from the tenant to redeem their property.

Cities and towns are understandably confounded by the choices they must make in this crisis, but further punishing working and poor families going through evictions cannot be the answer. People's Bailout Connecticut urges you to reject these bills.