

CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT

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**Testimony of Cathleen Anderson-Baker
Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.
Before the Planning and Development Committee**

Good afternoon distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee. My name is Cathleen Anderson-Baker and I am a community liaison at Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP). I am here today to speak in opposition to three bills: **S. B. No. 373, An Act Concerning Storage of Personal Items of Evicted Tenants; H.B. No. 5538, An Act Eliminating the Property Storage Mandate on Towns Regarding the Disposition and Storage of Possessions and Personal Effects of Evicted Tenants; and H.B. No. 5871, An Act Concerning the Responsibility for the Disposition of Possessions and Personal Effects of Evicted Tenants.**

Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc. is a non-profit legal services agency that provides individual and systemic legal services to indigent adults who have, or are perceived as having, psychiatric disabilities and who receive, or are eligible to receive, services from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Connecticut Legal Rights Project maintains offices at all DMHAS operated in-patient and out-patient facilities in the state. Our offices are staffed by attorneys, paralegal advocates, and two community liaisons. As a community liaison, I assist and support CLRP's housing advocacy by establishing and maintaining contact with

persons with psychiatric disabilities in Middlesex County. My specific duties include, meeting with clients and assessing their housing problems; informing clients about procedures to protect their housing rights; and making referrals to legal advocates and attorneys when in-depth advocacy is required.

Connecticut Legal Rights Project is extremely concerned about the passage of the aforementioned bills. Not only do we represent the state's most impoverished citizens, the pervasive nature of the symptoms associated with many of our client's psychiatric disabilities render them even more vulnerable to the arbitrary disposition of their belongings. An overwhelming majority of our clients have lifelong histories tainted by the trials of abuse, trauma, and discrimination. These clients survive on State-Administered General Assistance (SAGA), or Social Security Income (SSI) which provides them with very little left to furnish an apartment after paying for utilities and basic necessities such as food, clothing, and toiletries. In the general scheme of things, an individual with limited income such as SAGA and SSI cannot afford to store their items until they find another place to move. Moreover, these bills victimize those with chronic illness who are hospitalized, evicted without their knowledge, and are later discharged to find that their home *and* their property has been taken away from them.

CLRP is concerned that the passage of these bills will result in further trauma to our clients. Let us not forget that the landlord who prevails in an eviction proceeding wants little to no contact with the dispossessed tenant. Accordingly, a landlord may choose to throw out a ten-year old clock radio, worn couch, and old makeshift mattress without a bed frame because he or she perceives it to be junk. On the other hand, if a

client owns items perceived to be of value, a landlord may opt to keep these things or demand exorbitant amounts of money in storage fees making return of the property virtually impossible. For many of our clients their possessions are a symbol of independence and transition to recovery. For some, the sad reality is that the loss of these possessions can result in decompensation and hospitalization- care that the state will have to pay for.

Oftentimes, the stigma and difficulty associated with managing chronic psychiatric illness robs an individual of the support of family and friends, a luxury that many of us in this room take for granted. Accordingly, they cannot ask their sister or mother for money or assistance in moving their belongings; and they cannot rely on a brother or a friend to loan them two hundred dollars to pay the fees for a moving truck and a month of storage. While the purpose of these bills are undoubtedly to save our cities and towns the cost of storing the property of evicted tenants, it is unfair to expect the poor, the frail and the underrepresented populations of our communities to disproportionately bear the brunt of our current economic challenges.

For all of these reasons, we are asking the Committee to retain the present system of requiring each municipality to store a tenant's unclaimed property for fifteen days after an eviction.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions that you might have or provide you with any additional information.