

# Legal Assistance Resource Center ♦ of Connecticut, Inc. ♦

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## **S.B. 320 -- Selection of tenant commissioners**

Housing Committee public hearing -- March 4, 2010

Testimony of Raphael L. Podolsky

**Recommended Committee action: ADOPTION OF THE BILL**

Under Connecticut law, every housing authority board is required to have a least one commissioner who is a tenant of the housing authority (there must be at least two tenants if the board has more than five members). A tenant member is also required by federal law if the housing authority has any federally-subsidized public housing. The purpose of these requirements is to make sure that tenants have an effective voice in decision-making by the housing authority. Unfortunately, in most towns the appointment of the tenant commissioner is treated as a political appointment, in the same manner as other local board appointments, and the tenant who is appointed is rarely representative of the views of public housing tenants as a whole. As a result, the purpose of both state and federal law is being frustrated.

This bill corrects that situation by requiring:

- If a town-wide recognized public housing tenant association exists, it must be allowed to select the tenant commissioner, either through an election in which all public housing tenants can vote or, if its by-laws provide, by other means (e.g., a selection by the association's board of directors). We believe that there are only a small number of towns with town-wide housing tenant associations (i.e., representing all public housing projects within the town), so we do not expect this provision to be used frequently.
- If there is no town-wide tenant association, then the housing authority must hold an election upon receipt of a petition from the lesser of 10% of public housing residents or 75 such residents.
- If no such petition is filed, then the appointing authority must give all public housing tenant associations in its buildings an opportunity to recommend names and must consider them in making an appointment to the housing authority board (which is similar to the status quo).

Federal law also requires that the tenant commissioner be fully equal in authority to the other members of the board. S.B. 320 also brings the Connecticut statute into compliance with that requirement by eliminating the prohibition of the tenant commissioner's voting on rent increases.

It is our understanding that the Connecticut Housing Coalition and the Public Housing Resident Network are proposing some language changes to the bill. We support those changes and urge the Committee to incorporate them into a substitute bill.