

**Stratford Housing Authority
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Date: February 25 2011

To: Connecticut State Joint Committee on Housing

Re: Written Testimony Regarding HB 6461

From: Kevin S. Nelson
Executive Director
Stratford Housing Authority
295 Everett Street
Stratford, Connecticut 06615

I am writing in opposition to HB 6461 regarding the Selection of Tenant Commissioners for a public housing authority.

I am opposed to this bill in its entirety because the current process of having the local appointing authority make the selection has not been documented or proven to be faulty and I understand this bill was put forth on behalf of only one or two persons.

Since the municipality bears the burden and consequences of oversight, appointments to the Housing Authority board should rest with it. And since tenants, and tenant organizations, currently have a right to petition the appointing authority on behalf of a candidate for appointment as a Commissioner, I see no compelling reason to change the current successful process.

I am also opposed to this bill because it provides for an alternate selection method, in addition to an election, if one is provided in the tenant organization bylaws (see section (c)). When the housing industry and ConnNahro objected to this bill last year, which was passed but vetoed by Governor Rell, legislators said they were in favor of the bill because it called for an election. If this is still the case, and this bill is going to pass, then let there be *an election*. If you are going to allow an appointment or selection by the tenant organization governing board, as this bill does, then you have indeed deprived all tenants of participating in the process. This is a "built-in end around" to the election and in fact makes it so that an election does not even need to take place. If a selection or

appointment is going to be the method, then let the local appointing authority do it. Further, if the tenant organization is such that it is unable to hold a viable election, then why should it be trusted with an appointment.

Further, the establishment of the tenant organization should be done by vote of the residents of the Housing Authority. Following that, the new tenant organization should conduct an election of its governing board.

Also, the tenant organization, as part of its bylaws, should be required to do a screening of the tenant to determine if the tenant is in good standing with the Authority.

To reduce the appointment of a tenant commissioner to a popularity vote as opposed to a vetted selection performed by the municipal appointing authority would do more harm than good. Popular choices are not always the best choices. Most tenants are residents in good standing but many are not. What would happen if a tenant not in good standing gets elected and has a vendetta against the Authority? What would happen if a tenant is elected and then has to be evicted for a lease violation? How long would the election process take to make the replacement? What happens if a bad tenant commissioner keeps getting re-elected because the tenant is popular with the tenant population? In the case of a tenant commissioner election, would the municipality be able to bring an action against the tenant organization for any failure on the part of the tenant commissioner? Would it even be able to remove the tenant commissioner?

The Tenant Commissioner position is not one of day-to-day resident advocacy. The Tenant Commissioner must be capable of establishing policy for the Authority. Day-to-day resident advocacy is accomplished in a variety of ways. Residents can first and foremost come to the scheduled Board of Commissioner meetings. They can also respond and provide input on the Agency Plans, rules and regulations and other documents advertised for public comment. They can communicate through their resident organizations. Tenants are also ably represented through a variety of legal, fair housing and other organizations that protect their interests.

I wish to thank the members of the Committee and the Legislature for the difficult work that you do, the difficult decisions you make, your attention to this very important issue and the opportunity to comment.

Respectfully submitted.