

Testimony of Ms. Annie Walton before the Connecticut
Legislature's Housing Committee in Support of Senate Bill #1075

March 1, 2011

Hello, my name is Annie Walton. I am currently a resident of Westbrook Village, a state public housing complex in Hartford, Connecticut. I am here today to testify in support of Senate Bill # 1075.

I have lived in public housing since 1974 – for the last 37 years. During that time, I have been active in the tenant associations at my complexes. In fact, I was the President of the Westbrook Village Tenants Association until the fall of 2010. I am currently a member of the statewide Board of the Connecticut Public Housing Resident Association, PHRN. I think it is fair to say that I am an assertive person and I know my rights. But even for me, the simplest of things regarding my rights often become difficult because the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development has never established minimum state standards, in accordance with Section 8-68f of the Connecticut General Statutes, regarding tenants' rights, including grievance procedure rights.

Let me give you an example. Last week, I was infuriated about a situation in my complex. I decided to research whether or not I should grieve the issue. I knew that state law says that the Hartford Housing Authority must have a grievance procedure in place and that I have a right to a copy of it. So I called Mr. Michael Abreu, Executive Assistant to the Executive Director of the Hartford Housing Authority, and asked him directly for a copy of the grievance procedure. He replied, "Why do you want a copy of it?" He didn't say, "No problem. I will send it to you." He didn't say, "Gee, I don't know where it is. Give me a little time to find it." He said, "Why do you want a copy of it?"

Ladies and gentlemen, even though Section 8-68f of the Connecticut State Statutes establishes the fact that the Hartford Housing Authority must have an established tenant grievance procedure and that I have the right to a copy of that grievance procedure, you can see that my rights were not respected when I made a simple telephone call requesting information. In fact, you could even say that Mr. Abreu's question for me had an intimidating quality. Many other PHRN members have had the same experience when requesting a copy of their grievance procedure from their Housing Authority. Until a full set of minimum standards for residents' rights, including a grievance procedure, is enacted in accordance with Section 8-68f of state law, I do not believe we will ever be respected. That is why I am in support of Senate Bill # 1075.

Thank you for your time and attention.