**Testimony of Ellen E. Bromley**
**City of Stamford Social Services Coordinator**
**Before the Judiciary Committee**
**March 2, 2016**
**Regarding Raised Bill No. 245**

## An Act Concerning Municipal Recovery of Moneys Paid On Behalf of Displaced Tenants

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

On behalf of the City of Stamford, I thank you for the opportunity to publicly comment on, and endorse passage of Raised Bill No. 245.

Under Connecticut landlord tenant law, landlords are required to comply with the provisions of public health, building and housing codes that affect the health and safety of their tenants; to keep rental premises in fit and habitable condition.

Municipal departments with code enforcement capabilities are authorized to conduct property inspections. If an inspecting department finds conditions that constitute an immediate and serious threat to a tenant's health or safety, it may "condemn" the dwelling, designate it as "uninhabitable," and deem its occupants "displaced."

Housing code compliance in Stamford falls within the purview of the City's Department of Health and Social Services. When the Department finds that the condition of a residential building is defective to the extent that it poses a threat to the health and safety of its occupants, the Health Director may declare that house, apartment building or individual rental unit "unfit for human habitation" and order it vacated and/or closed. Tenants forced to move from their homes as the result of such orders will often be eligible for financial assistance to cover costs associated with permanent "relocation."

Current law provides that municipalities in which tenants displaced by code enforcement activities reside may hold the tenants' landlords liable for the cost of "relocation" payments made "to, or on behalf of the tenants." This provision is designed so that those landlords who permit their properties to fall into a degree of disrepair that eventually leads to condemnation bear the cost of same. To secure repayment, the municipality is authorized to place a lien on **<u>any</u>** real property owned by such landlords. "Relocation liens" have the

same priority as (and are filed, enforced and discharged in the same manner as) liens for municipal taxes (C.G.S. Sec. 8-268(a)(3) and 270).

Municipalities may sue landlords to recover payments due as well as compensation for the costs, including attorney fees, of bringing the suit. The law provides landlords an affirmative defense that they did not cause the displacement because they did not violate statutory responsibilities (C.G.S. Sec. 8-270a).

Raised Bill No. 245 amends Section 8-270a of the Connecticut General Statutes by explicitly authorizing landlord reimbursement for direct payments made by municipalities to providers of emergency or temporary housing on behalf of tenants displaced as the result of code violations.

Stamford wholeheartedly supports Raised Bill No. 245.