

TESTIMONY OF  
THE CONNECTICUT COALITION OF PROPERTY OWNERS  
Before the Program Review and Investigations Committee  
Wednesday September 21<sup>st</sup> 2016 10 AM room 2B, Legislative  
office building.

Good morning. My name is John Souza, I am a full time landlord and the President of the CT Coalition of Property Owners ("CCOPO"). CCOPO is the largest landlord property owner association in Connecticut for small and midsize Landlords. CCOPO has affiliate chapters in Bridgeport, Stamford and Windham, Enfield and West Hartford and the CT Association of Real Estate Investors ("CAREI"). Collectively CCOPO members own approximately 10,000 rental units throughout Connecticut.

CCOPO opposes discrimination in any form and supports housing for all.

The way the fair housing process currently is set up does not extend fairness and equal protections to all parties. It feels to many landlords that we are presumed guilty from the beginning of any C.H.R.O. complaint instead of the opposite. Even those that are innocent, when a government entity with seemingly endless resources is bringing charges the best we can hope for, the only way out is to settle the case. Landlords know full well that the standard of proof is low for the accuser and that the accusers have seemingly endless and free appeals. Whether innocent or guilty, landlords have none. Their chances of prevailing are low regardless of their innocence. To clear and preserve their good name their name would cost even larger sums of money. Unfortunately, it seems that due process is not extended to all parties involved in such complaints.

For example, a simple misunderstanding because of a language barrier and the lack of experience by not knowing what a Section 8 certificate is, end up costing small landlords large sums of money the system is not working justly.

CCOPO believes that a better way to screen cases would be to have a neutral committee having no financial interest in the outcome, before proceeding, particularly for lessor offenses requiring education classes for first time occurrences.

In a state where first time drunk drivers, and domestic assault cases can get education classes and a second chance, why don't accused landlords have the same opportunities?

CCOPO believes that the system should regain some balance in order to protect everyone's rights, both the accused and the accuser. The accused should have all the rights that the complainants are allowed including appeals, sworn complaints and recovery of attorney's fees. The system should preclude all damages payments beyond actual damages for most cases.

Secondly, C.H.R.O. needs to create a standard of regulations regarding companion animals. As it stands now, a person with any disability can bring a dog (or pets) in to an apartment regardless of breed, training, size, temperament, etc, even if the animal may well be a threat to the health and safety of other tenants. Certain breeds can cause Insurance companies to cancel your liability insurance. Nevertheless, as landlords, we cannot tell the tenant that such an animal is disallowed. All we can do is subject ourselves to higher insurance costs and lawsuits by other tenants for not adequately protecting them. Please bring some common sense regulations for the safety of all involved.

Lastly when local town ordinances conflict with CHRO's interpretation of federal housing laws, please require that the CHRO deal directly with the towns and hold the landlord harmless. Often, Town space requirements for number of occupants per room and the relationship of household members conflict with federal law and landlords are stuck in-between.

I thank you for your time and consideration and would like to let you know that CCOPO stands ready to provide any assistance in helping to repair this important system which is clearly broken.

CCOPO neither condones nor tries to protect bad landlords. However, the current CHRO housing appeal procedures catch the guilty and the innocent in the same net. Fairness is rarely one sided.

This completes my testimony. Thank you for your time.