

Testimony of Melani Sanchez in Support of H.B. 7297
Before the Planning & Development Committee of the Connecticut Legislature
Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Good Morning, Chairs & Ranking Members, and members of the Planning & Development Committee. My name is Melani Sanchez, and I am a registered voter in Fairfield, Connecticut.

I am writing you today to express my support for H.B. 7297 and the increased access to affordable housing in thriving communities in our state. I have lived in Bridgeport my whole life, but, in September, I received the opportunity to move to Fairfield through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Housing Choice Voucher program. I was overwhelmed with excitement at the possibility of living in a safe and quiet neighborhood, where my kids could go to highly-resourced schools.

Previous to my move in February, I lived in *Trumbull Gardens*, a federal public housing project. Parts of Bridgeport are very nice, but this complex is in a very dangerous part of town where shootings are a regular occurrence and police presence is constant. Every day, I tried to keep myself and my children from having to be in this environment by staying with my mother as much as I could, and only going back to our apartment to sleep. When I received my voucher, I saw it as a way to get us out of this environment for good, to make sure my children and I did not just survive but truly thrive. The issue I continued to face, however, was the severe lack of affordable housing units in Fairfield – even with the help of a voucher. Without access to these units, my voucher was practically unusable, which defeats the purpose of a program that was created out of the Fair Housing Act.

The past several months of searching were a real struggle. Even when I could actually find a place that seemed to be affordable, the utilities came out to be too expensive or the landlord gave it away to another family before I could finish the necessary paperwork. These unfortunate moments are normal parts of a housing search, of course, but when there are already so few choices that can be covered by my income and voucher, each loss felt that much more strenuous and disheartening.

When I was finally able to find a home for us, I was overcome by relief. The thought that I may lose my voucher grew with each passing day and with each negative outcome. This is the reality in which many families have to live, and too many of them have the unfortunate experience of losing a benefit that could help improve their lives.

Please cast your vote to support families like mine who desire to create a better life for ourselves and for our children. We all deserve the chance to access opportunity, and implementing H.B. 7297 both promotes that chance and ensures Connecticut remains inclusive – no matter the political climate.