



Ned Lamont  
Governor

STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE**  
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Good afternoon Senator Bradley, Representative McGee, Senator Hwang, Representative Kupchick, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. My name is Shanté Hanks and I am the Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Housing (DOH). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before your committee.

**DOH Offers the Following Comments on S.B. 54 - AN ACT CONCERNING A LANDLORD'S ABILITY TO REVIEW CRIMINAL RECORDS RELATING TO A PROSPECTIVE TENANT**

Over the past several years, and certainly throughout the last gubernatorial election, our state has been engaged in a conversation about how we can wisely reform our criminal justice system and work to build a more sound, equitable, and inclusive Connecticut. We've enacted comprehensive reforms throughout our criminal justice system that have led to historic decreases in the prison population and it's important that, as we continue this work, we are doing so with a holistic approach in mind. I can think of no better way to expand on these historic initiatives than by ensuring we are taking a guided approach to long sought equity in our housing systems. Governor Lamont has said he is committed to reforming our criminal justice system and those reforms are likely to involve robust conversations around how we approach access to housing and ensure former inmates have a smooth transition back into society.

To that end, it is our understanding that this proposal—along with many others on this agenda today—are meant to serve as a guide towards moving our state in that direction. We appreciate the intent of this legislation, and we would like to continue playing a role as this proposal develops. The current language would require the DOH Commissioner, "to establish a limited criminal records look-back period that a landlord may use when evaluating the housing application of a prospective tenant."

I would be remiss if I did not mention that federal and state law already establishes certain limitations and guidance for which a landlord can consider a potential tenant's criminal record in public housing i.e. Section 8 and RAP voucher recipients—but our agency does not have cognizance over establishing parameters around the private housing marketplace. We hope to be a valuable partner with the members of this committee and other stakeholders as this proposal develops and moves through the committee process.

**DOH Offers the Following Comments on H.B. 6074 - AN ACT CONCERNING RENTAL ASSISTANCE AND INTERDISTRICT SCHOOL CHOICE; H.B. 6077 - AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING VOUCHERS FOR FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN A SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM; & HB 5841: AN ACT CONCERNING RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR CERTAIN FAMILIES OF STUDENTS IN A SCHOOL CHOICE PROGRAM**

Since the establishment of DOH in 2013, our agency has been committed to building a Connecticut where affordable housing in strong, vibrant, and inclusive communities is accessible to individuals and families across the state—and homelessness is a thing of the past. Demographic data shows us that every town and city in the state has a demonstrated need for some kind of affordable housing and we know that when individuals and families have access to decent, safe, and affordable housing in areas of opportunity they have a greater likelihood of overall success in their lifetime. Essentially, improving quality of housing improves quality of life. After Governor Lamont transmits his budget to the legislature, we will have a greater understanding of the resources and funding we expect to have available in the coming fiscal years. This proposal is laudable—but it warrants further discussion. We look forward to continued engagement with this committee on how we can refine and implement this policy, in line with the fiscal priorities of the administration and the State as a whole.

**DOH Offers the Following Comments on H.B. 5712: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CONNECTICUT CLEAN SLATE LAW & H.B. 5713: AN ACT CONCERNING INQUIRIES ABOUT THE CRIMINAL CONVICTIONS OF A PROSPECTIVE TENANT**

We understand that the intent behind HB 5712 and HB 5713 is to reform the criminal justice system through specific housing interventions, reduce rates of recidivism, and build upon the housing first model—which states that the first step toward achieving overall stability is to ensure access to safe, decent, affordable housing. This is a guiding principal in basic psychology. Think of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. The first need is shelter, it’s the most basic component of that pyramid and it must be satisfied before all others.

We support the intent of this legislation—overcoming decades of institutionalized, and in some cases discriminatory housing policy, will not happen overnight. As Governor Lamont rolls out his budget proposal and his criminal justice and housing priorities become more evident, we look forward to engaging in meaningful discussions with the members of this committee and other stakeholders to ensure we’re building a state where opportunity is accessible to everyone, where our citizens are not only judged by the actions of their past—but rather by their prospects for the future.

I know some of my responses to these proposals may be left open-ended, and that is by design. We are committed to working with you in the coming months and years to develop sound housing policy. Please, do not mistake these responses for a lack of action or an unwillingness to partner.

As the Governor’s policy priorities and platforms continue to take shape, know that our agency stands ready to work with the legislature on the important issues affecting our communities. As previously stated, housing is one of our most basic needs and this kind of policy deserves leaders who are willing to engage in thoughtful and open-minded conversations on how best to move our state forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. Should any of the members of this committee have additional questions, I, along with our Acting Commissioner, Michael Santoro, and other staff are prepared to answer those for you at this time.