



CONNECTICUT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
HOUSING COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 18, 2021

In support of:

SB 804, AAC INCLUSION IN CERTAIN COMMUNITIES.

HB 6430, AAC HOUSING AUTHORITY JURISDICTION.

HB 6431, AAC HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE-IMPACTED PERSONS.

HB 6433, AAC INSPECTIONS OF RENTAL PROPERTY PRIOR TO OCCUPANCY OR TERMINATION, LATE RENTAL PAYMENTS AND DESIGNATION OF A RENTAL HOUSING OMBUDSMAN.

HB 6437, AN ACT REQUIRING LANDLORDS TO NOTIFY TENANTS OF FORECLOSURE PROCEEDINGS.

In opposition to:

HB 5683, AAC AFFORDABLE HOUSING.

HB 5686, AAC COVID-19 RELATED PROTECTIONS FOR TENANTS AND PROPERTY OWNERS.

Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, Senator Cicarella, Representative Poletta and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I am the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order that mandated that the

state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community.

CLRP supports bills that provide opportunities for people to live in decent, safe, affordable, and accessible housing in all 169 cities and towns in this state.

In the past, we have offered testimony in support of many of the concepts outlined in **SB 804**. I would note that topics of training should include fair housing law.

Permitting housing authorities to extend their jurisdiction as outlined in **HB 6430** would increase housing choice and opportunity for the individuals served by the housing authorities who choose to exercise an option to extend their jurisdiction.

Criminal legal system reform must include reform of the various systems that affect a person's return to the community. Most people convicted of a crime eventually leave incarceration. The inability to obtain stable housing reduces their opportunities to re-establish a life in the community and increases the likelihood of recidivism. Neither of those outcomes are desirable. Given what we know about racial and ethnic disparities of the criminal legal system, failure to address housing opportunities for justice-impacted persons means reinforcing and exacerbating those disparities. **HB 6431** represents meaningful change in the right direction.

HB 6433 protects the rights of both tenants and property owners when it comes to the conditions of a rented dwelling unit. The limitation on late fees is reasonable. Having someone within DOH to serve as a rental-housing ombudsman represents an opportunity to resolve disputes early. Ideally, the final budget would include adequate appropriations for this position.

HB 6437: Requiring property owners to notify tenants of foreclosure proceedings against the property owner provides more information to tenants so they can make better-informed plans to remain stably housed.

Connecticut's lack of affordable housing is a well-known problem; **HB 5683** would weaken the state's Affordable Housing Act. Towns that want to count as "affordable housing" dwelling units that do not currently count as such under existing law want to do so in order to be able to deny developers the opportunity to

create additional units of affordable housing. I have observed this happening in the town in which I live, and it is not right. In order to protect Connecticut's existing supply of affordable housing, we must not change the definition of what constitutes affordable housing. The reason that only deed-restricted and subsidized units count as affordable is that they are required by law to remain affordable and available to eligible occupants.

CLRP opposes **HB 5686**. We should not be creating more exceptions to the protections of the existing eviction moratorium. Nuisance complaints are often lodged against tenants for disability-related behaviors. We should not be evicting people during a pandemic and risking further spread of COVID-19. We agree with the proponents of the bill that landlords and tenants both need rental relief, and hope that the federal funds designated for rental assistance in the most recent coronavirus relief package are distributed expeditiously.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on a number of bills.