



Testimony of

**Sal Luciano, President
Connecticut AFL-CIO**

Housing Committee
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HB 6531 An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings

Good afternoon Senator Lopes, Representative McGee and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Sal Luciano, and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 220,000 workers in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 6531 An Act Concerning the Right to Counsel in Eviction Proceedings.

When it comes to evictions, tenants are set up to fail. Most cannot afford legal representation. Without it, they are left on their own to navigate the complexities of eviction proceedings. It's no surprise that a majority of unrepresented tenants lose their cases and are ultimately evicted. That can have devastating consequences for individuals and families. They might never recover financially and the emotional trauma of becoming homeless could hurt families for generations. It doesn't have to be this way. HB 6531 would add fairness to eviction proceedings by making sure tenants have competent legal representation.

The lack of affordable housing was a serious issue before the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, with hundreds of thousands out of work through no fault of their own, the only thing keeping unemployed tenants in their homes is an executive order that expires in a few weeks. Mass evictions are looming. In a few weeks, evictions will literally mean the difference between life and death. The very least the state can do is to make sure these tenants have access to an attorney to protect their rights.

HB 6531 also requires the Judicial Department to engage and educate tenants about their rights and provide information about legal representation available to them. That is a long overdue requirement.

Across the country, cities have already implemented similar legislation. Our neighbor, New York City was the first, but San Francisco, Cleveland, Boulder, Newark, Philadelphia and Baltimore have also joined. They have seen a dramatic reduction in convictions, with more tenants prevailing and retaining their rights to stay in their homes. We hope Connecticut will help lead the way. We urge the Committee to support this bill.