Testimony in Support of

H.B. 6554: An Act Appropriating Funds For Certain Homelessness Response Programs

S.B. 909: An Act Establishing A Right To Housing

S.B. 907: An Act Concerning Fair Rent Commissions

S.B. 906: An Act Concerning Housing Protections For Victims Of Family Violence

Joint Committee on Housing
February 2, 2023

Dear Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Senator Lesser, Representative Khan, Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and esteemed members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Eli Sabin, and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based advocacy organization working to ensure that one day Connecticut is a thriving and equitable state where all children achieve their full potential.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports H.B. 6554: An Act Appropriating Funds For Certain Homelessness Response Programs

On behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, I would like to testify in support of HB 6554 and the critical $51 million investment it would make in homelessness services in our state. At Voices, our focus is on improving the well-being of children and families across Connecticut, and we strongly believe that addressing homelessness is crucial to ensuring that all children have access to safe, stable, and nurturing environments to thrive in.

Making this investment in homelessness services will get people housed now and provide families with the resources they need to regain stability. In this unprecedented moment of scarce housing, high rent, and rising homelessness, the homeless response system needs a surge of funding so it can help families access affordable housing, find support for mental health and substance abuse issues, and simply stay warm during the cold winter months when the lack of a stable home can be incredibly dangerous. If we make this investment to rescue the homeless response system, families will be able to get back on their feet and build a brighter future for themselves and their children. It is our belief at Voices that investing in homelessness services is not only the right thing to do, but it is also a wise investment in our communities and the future of our state because our economy, neighborhoods, and families are strong when we leave no one behind.
Just Facts:

- According to data from the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, homelessness is up 39% this year.
- 211 fielded 382,825 calls related to housing and shelter in 2022.
- It is twice as expensive for an individual to be homeless than housed and five times more expensive for a family. Homelessness currently costs the state more than $100 million every year.¹

Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 909: An Act Establishing A Right To Housing

Safe housing is a basic necessity. Research shows that children and young people living in poor-quality housing are more likely to struggle in school and experience behavioral and emotional problems.² Housing instability also has long-term impacts on the future earnings: adults who moved 3 or more times as young children earned 52 percent less than adults who experienced more housing stability as children. Housing affordability and stability encourage work and reduce the chances of incarceration.³

But Connecticut faces a dire housing affordability crisis. Approximately 50 percent of renters statewide spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, a benchmark conventionally used to indicate that a tenant is cost-burdened.⁴ This bill is a step toward addressing Connecticut’s housing crisis. Establishing housing as a right within the state will allow Connecticut’s children to engage at school in their full capacity and allow Connecticut’s parents to best take care of their children while also growing their careers. While we acknowledge that establishing a right to housing may be expensive, it should be an aspirational goal for all of us who believe that every resident of our great state deserves a home. Housing is a human right, and this bill will move us one step closer to making that not just a statement but a reality.

Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 907: An Act Concerning Fair Rent Commissions

Connecticut Voices for Children supports this proposed bill to require that towns with more than 10,000 residents establish a fair rent commission. The housing crisis in our state has created a situation where many tenants are struggling to keep up with excessive rent increases and too many landlords are neglecting their responsibility to maintain safe and livable conditions in their properties. This proposed bill is a necessary step to address these problems and ensure that tenants are protected from unjust housing conditions.

³ Ibid.
Fair rent commissions, which legislation passed last year required in all towns with more than 25,000 people, are a critical resource for tenants facing maintenance neglect and exploitative rental charges or who simply need somewhere to adjudicate a dispute fairly and impartially. With extremely low vacancy rates and rents rising, more tenants need to be able to bring complaints against landlords who are using their market power to neglect repairs and ask for excessive rent increases. Fair rent commissions provide tenants with a voice and ensure that their rights are protected. The commissions can also play a critical role in helping tenant unions collectively advocate for tenant rights, especially against very large and deep-pocketed landlords.

The proposed bill is a proactive solution to the housing crisis that will protect thousands of tenants from being taken advantage of by landlords. Fair rent commissions will provide an impartial body that ensures the housing market operates in an equitable manner for all parties. Voices urges the Housing Committee to support this legislation.

**Connecticut Voices for Children supports S.B. 906: An Act Concerning Housing Protections For Victims Of Family Violence**

We have a moral obligation to protect victims of family violence and ensure they have safe and stable housing. Many victims are often discriminated against by landlords who refuse to rent to them or try to kick them out of their homes due to stigmas that make it challenging for survivors to find and keep a place to live. This bill would address this issue by protecting victims from such discrimination and ensuring that they have equal access to housing opportunities.

SB 906 is crucial because it recognizes the importance of providing victims of family violence with a safe and stable place to live. It is well known that safe and stable housing is critical in helping victims escape abusive situations and rebuild their lives. The proposed bill works to ensure that victims of family violence are not punished for the actions of their abusers and that the law recognizes they deserve the same opportunities for housing as any other individual. This legislation will play a crucial role in breaking the cycle of violence and helping victims reclaim their lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Eli Sabin
Legislative Coordinator
Connecticut Voices for Children