



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6784, An Act Concerning
Noncompliant Landlords, and Senate Bill 1113, An Act Concerning Fair
Rent Commissions**

Senator Cabrera, Representative Wood, Ranking Members Hwang and Pavalock-D'Amato, and distinguished members of the Insurance Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in support of House Bill 6784, An Act Concerning Noncompliant Landlords, and Senate Bill 1113, An Act Concerning Fair Rent Commissions.

The ACLU-CT believes in a society where all people, including those who have been convicted or accused of a crime, have equal opportunity to contribute to their communities and build successful and fulfilling lives. Everybody needs a safe, sanitary, and stable place to live, which builds prosperous communities. But especially since the pandemic, rent has skyrocketed across the country and across the state, increasing by 20 percent on average over the last two years.¹ At the same time, wages have not kept up with inflation, and the frequency of no-fault evictions has also increased, meaning that tenants are losing their homes even when a landlord did not claim they did anything wrong.²

People in Connecticut cannot have a future here if they cannot afford a place to live. When housing becomes unaffordable, there are cascading effects—like displacement

¹ See, e.g., Ronnuala Darby-Hudgens, *Expanded Fair Rent Commissions*, CONN. FAIR HOUSING CTR. (Apr. 1, 2022), <https://www.ctfairhousing.org/expanded-fair-rent-commissions/>.

² See, e.g., Tess Terrible & Walter Smith Randolph, *No Fault Evictions Are on the Rise in Connecticut: Here's Why*, CT PUBLIC (Apr. 15, 2022), <https://www.ctpublic.org/show/where-we-live/2022-04-15/no-fault-evictions-are-on-the-rise-in-connecticut-heres-why>.

from beloved homes, neighborhoods, and schools. When working people can afford to pay their rent, they can take better care of their families. Rent hikes and no-fault evictions are displacing people from their homes and communities, fueling gentrification, and increasing evictions and homelessness, which, because of systemic racism, disproportionately harms Black and brown working-class renters and immigrants.

The ACLU-CT supports House Bill 6784 as a good step to protecting people from housing situations where landlords are systemically noncompliant with basic health and fire code regulations. This bill narrowly applies to landlords of 500+ unit dwellings, but we would encourage this Committee to also consider legislation that applies to all landlords who fail to follow our health and fire codes. No person should be subjected to unsafe and unsanitary living conditions.

The ACLU-CT also supports Senate Bill 1113, which requires municipalities of 5,000 or more, rather than the current 25,000 or more, to adopt ordinances creating fair rent commissions. Fair rent commissions are volunteer boards at the municipal level with powers to stop unconscionable rent increases, to set phase-in rent increases, and to delay a rent increase until housing code violations are fixed.³ Fair rent commissions are often the only avenue for people to challenge significant rent increases, but these commissions are completely unavailable to renters in 145 towns with populations under 25,000 people. The ACLU-CT supports expanding Senate Bill 1113 to require that all Connecticut municipalities establish fair rent commissions. As such, we urge this Committee to support Senate Bill 1113 and its expansion.