



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 143, An Act Concerning Just Cause Evictions

Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Ranking Members Sampson and Scott, and members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of Senate Bill 143, An Act Concerning Just Cause Evictions.

The ACLU-CT believes that everyone deserves access to safe and affordable housing, including justice-impacted people. When housing becomes unaffordable, there are cascading effects—like displacement from beloved homes, neighborhoods, and schools. When working people can afford to pay their rent, they can take better care of their families. Even the process of applying for apartments is costly and onerous—in addition to charging first and last months of rent and a security deposit, it is common for landlords to pass the fees of credit reports, criminal background checks, employment history reports, and rental history reports off to tenants. This is simply unsustainable for people applying for housing as rent has skyrocketed across the country and across the state, increasing by 20 percent on average over the last two years.¹ No-fault evictions are displacing people from their homes and communities, fueling gentrification, and increasing evictions and homelessness, which, because of systemic racism and systemic inequity, disproportionately harms Black and brown working-class renters and immigrants.

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/>.

The housing affordability crisis in Connecticut is long past its boiling point. Expanding just cause eviction protections is a cost-effective policy to lower eviction rates and bolster housing security. Just cause protections puts the onus on landlords to have a basis for filing an eviction or declining to renew a lease, such as nonpayment of rent or another lease violation. Just cause is far from a new policy—for forty years in Connecticut, statute has prohibited no-fault evictions against renters living in apartment complexes with five or more units and who are 62 or older and/or have a disability. Federal law protects people living in public and subsidized housing, and New Jersey, New Hampshire, Oregon, Washington, and California have already implemented expanded just cause protections.²

Most renters in Connecticut are not protected by just cause. Very little prevents landlords from arbitrarily evicting their tenants, even if they have abided perfectly by the terms of their lease. Oftentimes, these evictions are done on short notice with the primary purpose of increasing rent and making an even greater profit. Expanded just cause protections are predicted to reduce evictions, non-renewals, and no-fault move out notices.³ The choice to evict a person from their home has a dire impact on employment, health, and children’s schooling. Arbitrary evictions tear at the fabric of the overall community by increasing housing insecurity and homelessness.

Just cause protections are also important in preventing housing discrimination. Arbitrary evictions are often motivated by discrimination against protected classes, like a person’s race, family status, or disability. For example, the Connecticut Fair Housing Center found that Black and Latine renters are two to three times more likely to be evicted than white renters.⁴ But housing discrimination cases are difficult to prove; people are often not aware of their rights during eviction proceedings because not everybody has easy access to a lawyer. In fact, 90 percent of landlords

² *Pursuing Housing Justice: Interventions for Impact*, URBAN INST. (accessed Feb. 16, 2024),

<https://www.urban.org/apps/pursuing-housing-justice-interventions-impact/just-cause-eviction-laws>.

³ *The Case for Expanding Just Cause Eviction Protections*, CONN. FAIR HOUSING CTR. (2024), <https://ctfairhousing.org/the-case-for-expanding-just-cause-eviction-protections/>.

⁴ *Id.*

have legal representation in eviction cases, compared to merely 10 percent of tenants.⁵ Many renters will just leave their homes, rather than fight and risk a no-fault eviction on their permanent record. Arbitrary evictions can also be used by landlords to intimidate renters against asserting their legal rights to safe living conditions or against forming tenants' unions. Just cause protections aid tenants in exercising their legal rights without fear of retaliatory evictions.

Just cause eviction laws does not prevent a landlord from ever evicting a person—these laws merely set a minimum standard that must be met for an eviction to take place. Landlords can file evictions, even when they have violated the tenant's legal rights, like ignoring maintenance requests, locking tenants out, or shutting off utilities.⁶ At the same time, just cause protections do not leave landlords without recourse against people who violate the terms of their lease. Landlords may still evict tenants where there is a justification. Proper grounds for eviction may include nonpayment of rent, lease violations, refusal to agree to reasonable rent increases, the landlord's permanent removal of the unit from the housing market, or a bona fide intention of the landlord to use the property as their principal residence. Past evictions can decimate a person's ability to secure housing, often limiting them to lower-quality housing options, and increasing their risk of homelessness.⁷ Like existing just cause protections, this would not apply to owner-occupied one to four family homes.

Just cause eviction protections are a common-sense policy that confronts our housing affordability crisis head-on by preventing wrongful evictions and promoting housing stability. Everyone deserves access to safe and affordable housing, including justice-

⁵ Sandra Park & John Pollock, *Tenant's Right to Counsel is Critical to Fight Mass Evictions and Advance Race Equity During the Pandemic and Beyond*, ACLU (Jan. 12, 2021), <https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/tenants-right-to-counsel-is-critical-to-fight-mass-evictions-and-advance-race-equity-during-the-pandemic-and-beyond/>.

⁶ *Pursuing Housing Justice: Interventions for Impact*, URBAN INST. (accessed Feb. 16, 2024), <https://www.urban.org/apps/pursuing-housing-justice-interventions-impact/just-cause-eviction-laws>.

⁷ Robert Collinson & David Reed, *The Effects of Eviction on Low-Income Households*, NYU (Dec. 2018), available at https://www.law.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/upload_documents/evictions_collinson_reed.pdf

impacted people. The ACLU-CT strongly supports Senate Bill 143, and encourages this Committee to do the same.