



**Testimony in Support of Raised H.B. 6588
(AN ACT CONCERNING RENT STABILIZATION)**

By Sarah Mervine, Center for Children's Advocacy,
Director of CCA's Medical-Legal Partnership Project at Yale New Haven Health
February 21, 2023

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore and Members of the Housing Committee:

Thank you for providing the **Center for Children's Advocacy** ("CCA") an opportunity to submit testimony in support of **Raised H.B. 6588, An act Concerning Rent Stabilization**. I am an attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy, and the Director of CCA's Medical-Legal Partnership at Yale New Haven Health.

CCA is the largest non-profit legal organization in New England devoted exclusively to advocating on behalf of the legal rights of children. CCA provides holistic legal services for poor children in Connecticut communities through individual representation, education and training, and systemic advocacy. CCA's Medical-Legal Partnership is an interdisciplinary collaboration between CCA and medical/clinical partners that seeks to root out health disparities and promote health equity through interdisciplinary interventions in Connecticut. The Yale Medical-Legal Partnership is focused exclusively on pediatrics and helps children and their families from all over Connecticut with a range of legal issues including housing, education, and benefits.

We support a rent cap for Connecticut and the passage of Raised H.B. 6588, with some amendments, as explained below.

At the YNH Medical Legal Partnership, my clients are vulnerable families from all over Connecticut, referred to me from their doctors, nurses, social workers and care coordinators. One of the main issues we see are housing problems, including housing instability, the lack of safe and affordable housing and housing conditions that are harming children's health. Several of the issues I see on a daily basis would be directly ameliorated by a real rent cap bill. For example:

- 1. Lack of Affordable Housing** – after the pandemic, many people found their rents raised significantly, over 20% over the last two years. At the same time, their wages, disability benefits and other forms of income lagged behind. Even those who are lucky enough to have a Section 8 voucher, a voucher that allows them to seek out private housing and pay only 30% of their income, have found that the rents in certain towns have gone so high that they have surpassed the "rent reasonableness" amount

for Section 8. As a result, many people cannot find decent and safe housing for their families.

- 2. Unaddressed Housing Conditions** – Many of the children we see live in substandard housing with conditions issues that are directly affecting their health. We see leaks that go unaddressed, causing mold to grow, broken and drafty windows and doors that do not keep in heat, old, moldy carpeting and flaked and chipping paint that contains lead. Many families want to move but the recent spike in rents makes it impossible for them to find anywhere to go. Additionally, though we help people understand their rights to call the local inspector and have such conditions fixed, many families worry that if they complain about conditions a landlord will simply raise the rent on them or file a so-called “no fault” eviction. While there are defenses to such evictions, once an eviction is filed against a family the damage is done on their records. For this reason, many families are stuck living in sub-standard conditions that are affecting their children’s health.
- 3. Housing Instability Affecting Children’s Care** – many families with medically complex children or children with special needs live close to their providers and have developed specific plans with the children’s school and staff to get the services they need. As rents increase, families who have stayed in the same places for many years are forced to leave their homes, disrupting needed services and school plans.

We must prioritize the wellbeing of children and their families and we must also recognize the costs to our schools and communities created from housing instability. For this reason, we at CCA strongly support a rent cap, with the following changes:

1. A cap should be in the range of 2.5% to 3% to follow what families can afford;
2. It is crucial that such a cap cover apartments in between tenants so landlords can’t push out tenants to increase the rent and so apartments stay affordable; and
3. Any cap should expand good cause eviction protection so renters can have greater stability and be able to work to fix housing conditions without fear of a retaliatory rent increase or no cause eviction.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Mervine
Director, YNHH Medical-Legal Partnership Project for CCA