

CONNECTICUT ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HOUSING MATTERS



Reply to:

16 Main St., 2nd floor New Britain, CT. 06051 (860) 616-4472

NOTICE OF NEXT MEETING 2:00 p.m. Wednesday, December 8, 2021

This meeting will be held electronically by Zoom. Details as to how to access the meeting will be distributed before the meeting.

Minutes of the Meeting of September 22, 2021

<u>Council members present</u>: Michael Clinton, Richard DeParle, Kathy Flaherty, Venoal Fountain, Houston Putnam Lowry, Carl Lupinacci, Stephanie Ma, Raphael Podolsky, J.L. Pottenger, Dave Purvis, Margaret Suib, Richard Tenenbaum, John Wirzbicki

Council members absent: Loo Dahlke, Jane Kelleher, Sam Neves

<u>Public officials present</u>: John Kirwin (Chief Housing Prosecutor), William Pitt (Chief Housing Clerk), Dawn Parker (Department of Housing)

Others present: Jan Chiaretto, Ashley Daley, Nancy Hronek, Lisa Iacino, Sharon Levy, V. Edward Quinto, Amy Saji, Shelley White

<u>Call to order</u>: The meeting was called to order as a Zoom meeting at 2:06 pm on Wednesday, September 22, 2021. Chairperson Raphael Podolsky presided.

1. <u>Preliminary matters</u>

- a. The chairperson reviewed the Zoom rules for the meeting.
- b. The agenda was approved unanimously (motion by Richard DeParle, second by John Wirzbicki).
- c. The minutes of the June 16, 2021, meeting were approved unanimously (motion by John Wirzbicki, second by Richard DeParle).
- d. The chair announced, without objection, that there would be a limit of five minutes per speaker during the Public Comment portion of the meeting.

2. Public comment

V. Edward Quinto reported on an eviction in Bridgeport in which the marshal refused to remove properties because of evidence of a rodent infestation in the unit. The possessions were therefore left in the apartment. When the tenants were unable to remove the possessions within 15 days, the landlord discarded or kept the possessions. The statutes, however, presume that the possessions will be moved out of the unit. Discussion of the underlying policy issue was, by agreement, tabled until the December meeting.

- 3. Discussion on rental assistance, eviction, and how the housing court system is operating
 - <u>UniteCT</u>: Dawn Parker of DOH responded to comments and questions.
 - Council members reported that payments on new applications are now coming faster, but old applications often remain backed up in the system. It was also reported that DOH has liberalized some of its documentation requirements. For example, DOH will now accept an abbreviated lease, rather than the full lease, as proof of a tenancy.
 - There was concern expressed that, if a judgment has already entered, some clerks' offices will not permit the withdrawal of a case by the landlord, as required by UniteCT when a UniteCT application has been paid by the State, without a formal motion to open the judgment and payment of the \$75 statutory fee. UniteCT pays rent only and will not pay entry or attorney's fees. This has resulted in some landlords refusing to withdraw the action. It was suggested that withdrawal might be possible without payment of a fee if the judgment is vacated pursuant to a caseflow request, rather than motion to open, or that Judicial might waive the fee on UniteCT-related motions to open. A motion was made to recommend to Judicial that it identify and authorize a way to withdraw or dismiss a UniteCT settlement without the payment of a \$75 fee. The motion passed unanimously.
 - DOH will not waive UniteCT's 12-month limit on payment of rent arrearage or the \$15,000 maximum payment, but, through the appeals process (at <u>unitectappeal@ct.gov</u>), the tenant can request an exception based on extenuating circumstances. Such a request can be made early in the process or after denial of the excess amount.
 - Executive Orders 12D and 13: These Executive Orders will expire on September 30 unless extended. The orders require that most notices to quit give 30 days' notice and the right to cure non-payments, that the landlord complete an application to UniteCT before serving a notice to quit based on non-payment of rent, and that a pending eviction be stayed for 30 days if an application for UniteCT is made. The Governor has indicated an intent to extend these provisions if his emergency powers are extended [Post-meeting note: These orders have been extended until February 15, 2022.] The operative portion of Executive Order 12D is attached to these Minutes as Appendix A.
 - <u>Pre-execution hearings</u>: During federal CDC moratorium, the Judicial Branch scheduled hearings instituted a policy of scheduling hearings before issuance of a summary process execution. The CDC moratorium is now over, and pre-execution hearings are now

- scheduled only if they would have been scheduled pre-pandemic. Under Section 17-53 of the Connecticut Practice Book., pre-execution hearings are held automatically only on non-monetary violations of stipulated judgments. Alleged failures to make a monetary payment receive a hearing only if the tenant files an objection.
- <u>Involvement of housing mediators</u>: Bill Pitt responded to comments and questions. Fourteen new housing mediators have been hired. This more than doubles the number of mediators. They are being paired with experienced mediators for training. They are involved in pre-execution hearings only if the judge chooses to refer for mediation. Most housing courts have two dockets a mediation docket and docket for the judge in the virtual courtroom. A case referred for mediation will usually not be mediated on the same day that it is referred.
- <u>Future regarding in-person, virtual, and hybrid hearings</u>: Bill Pitt reported that criminal housing matters in the housing courts will be heard in person, with social distancing, starting in two weeks. They are already being heard in-person in the non-housing court districts. It is not yet known when in-person hearings will return in other housing cases. The Council has previously recommended a return to in-person as soon as possible, and discussion at the meeting reflected that consensus. It was reported that a summary process case will be heard in-person next week in the New Haven Housing Court because of the complexity of using multiple interpreters in a virtual hearing. If the parties request an in-person hearing, it is up to the judge to decide, but such requests are rare. A motion was made to recommend to the Judicial Branch that the highest priorities for a return to in-person proceedings in housing should be (a) all hearings in which there is an unrepresented party on either side and (b) all trials. The motion was approved unanimously.

4. P.A. 21-34 – Right to counsel in eviction proceedings:

Section 1 of this act, which was adopted by the General Assembly during the 2021 legislative session, creates a program to provide a right to counsel in eviction cases and terminations of housing subsidies for tenants with income below 80% of state median income. The program is funded with federal money. Section 1 of the act is attached to these Minutes as Appendix B. The Connecticut Bar Foundation has been designated as the entity that will administer the program. The act created a Working Group, appointed by members of the legislature, to provide advice in the development of the program. The Working Group includes four members of the Advisory Council – Michael Clinton, Dave Purvis, Kathy Flaherty, and Raphael Podolsky. The program is not expected to be in operation until January. The Working Group has developed a notice to tenants that, as of October 1, must be attached to each notice to quit and summary process writ. It is expected that the notice will be revised substantially in January after the program actually starts. The currently-required notice will be posted on the Judicial Branch website [Post-meeting note: The notice can be found at https://www.jud.ct.gov/HomePDFs/RighttoCounselNotice093021.pdf, and a copy of the notice is attached to these Minutes as Appendix C]. The Working Group is currently working on how the program will be phased in. It is likely that it will begin in certain towns or zip codes only, rather than the entire state at once.

V. Edward Quinto expressed concern about a summary process case that had come to his attention in which a disabled tenant without counsel was forced to go to trial before a lawyer he found could get into the case.

5. Report of the Forms Committee

J.L. Pottenger outlined the committee's report, which recommended changes to the summary process answer form (HM-5), including a draft of the proposed form. The report is attached as Appendix D to these Minutes. The report recommended in particular that a defense of Acceptance and Waiver be added to the checklist of common defenses and that the catch-all phrase "Additional information" be changed to "Additional reasons why I should not be evicted. It was moved to endorse the recommendations in the report and submit them to the Judicial Branch (motion by Houston Putnam Lowry, second by John Wirzbicki). The motion was approved unanimously with one abstention (Venoal Fountain).

- 6. <u>December Council meeting</u>: The Council agreed that its December meeting should be held virtually.
- 7. Other business: There was none.
- 8. <u>Adjournment</u>: The meeting adjourned at 4:00 pm (motion by Houston Putnam Lowry, second by John Wirzbicki).

Respectfully submitted,

Kathy Flaherty Secretary

APPENDIX A

EXCERPTS FROM EXECUTIVE ORDER 12D

- 1. Application to UniteCT Required Before Delivering Notice to Quit for Nonpayment of Rent. Prior to the delivery of a notice to quit for nonpayment of rent, the owner or lessor of any residential land or building, any apartment in any building, any dwelling unit, any trailer, or any land upon which a trailer is used or stands, or the owner's or lessor's legal representative, or the owner's or lessor's attorney-at-law, or in-fact, shall complete and submit the landlord's portion of an application to UniteCT, the State of Connecticut's program to implement the emergency rental assistance programs established by section 501 of Division N of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260 (December 27, 2020) and section 3201 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub. L. No. 117-2 (March 11, 2021). A notice to quit for nonpayment of rent shall include the relevant UniteCT case number. Upon logging in to the UniteCT application portal, landlords can view a case number on the "Case Info" tab within their application.
- **2.** (a) <u>30 Days' Notice</u>. Notwithstanding any contrary provision of sections 47a-23 and 47a-23a of the Connecticut General Statutes, when the owner or lessor, or the owner's or lessor's legal representative, or the owner's or lessor's attorney-at-law, or in-fact, desires to obtain possession or occupancy of any residential land or building, any apartment in any building, any dwelling unit, any trailer, or any land upon which a trailer is used or stands, and (A) when a rental agreement or lease of such property, whether in writing or by parol, terminates by (I) lapse of time or (II) for nonpayment of rent, or (B) when one originally had the right or privilege to occupy such premises but such right or privilege has terminated, such owner or lessor, or such owner's or lessor's legal representative, or such owner's or lessor's attorney-at-law, or in-fact, shall give notice to each lessee or occupant to quit possession or occupancy of such land, building, apartment or dwelling unit, at least thirty days before the time specified in the notice for the lessee or occupant to quit possession or occupancy.
- **(b)** Opportunity to Cure. Notwithstanding any contrary provision of sections 47a-23 and 47a-23a of the Connecticut General Statutes, a notice to quit for a reason stated in paragraph (a) of this subsection shall not permit the termination of the rental agreement until after the date specified to each lessee or occupant to quit possession or occupancy of such land, building, apartment or dwelling unit. A use and occupancy disclaimer included in or combined with such notice to quit shall not take effect until after the date specified in the notice for the lessee or occupant to quit possession or occupancy or the date of the completion of any pretermination process required by federal law or regulations, whichever is later. If, at the expiration of the thirty days prescribed herein, the lessee or occupant has not remedied any nonpayment of rent, including but not limited to through the approval of an application for rental assistance from UniteCT, and neglects or refuses to quit possession or occupancy of the premises, any commissioner of the Superior Court may issue a writ, summons and complaint in accordance with the provisions of Section 47a-23 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

- 3. <u>Documents Accompanying a Notice to Quit</u>. In addition to any other requirements imposed by state or federal law, all residential notices to quit shall be delivered with an English and a Spanish copy of the State of Connecticut's UniteCT Flyer and, prior to July 31, 2021, of the CDC Declaration accompanying the CDC Order, "Temporary Halt in Residential Evictions to Prevent the Further Spread of COVID-19," 85 CFR 55292 (September 4, 2020). The inclusion of such copies shall not render the notice to quit equivocal. The UniteCT Flyer may be found at: https://portal.ct.gov/DOH/DOH/Programs/UniteCT The CDC Declaration may be found at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/evictiondeclare_d508.pdf
 Translations to multiple languages may be found at: https://nlihc.org/coronavirus-and-housing-homelessness/national-eviction-moratorium
- **4.** Stay Upon Filing of UniteCT Application. Notwithstanding any deadlines or any time requirements for advancement of pleadings in Section 47a of the Connecticut General Statutes, if, during the course of any summary process proceeding, except a proceeding brought solely on the ground of serious nuisance, as defined in section 47a-15 or 21-80, an application is made by the landlord or the tenant to UniteCT, further proceedings shall be stayed for thirty days or until a decision is made upon the application, whichever is earlier, and, if such application is approved, until such UniteCT payment is made and the summary process action is withdrawn or dismissed.

APPENDIX B

Substitute House Bill No. 6531

Public Act No. 21-34

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO COUNSEL IN EVICTION PROCEEDINGS....

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2021*) (a) As used in this section:

- (1) "Covered individual" means any party to a covered matter who is an incomeeligible tenant, lessee or occupant, for residential purposes, of any land or building, any apartment in any building, any dwelling unit, any trailer or mobile manufactured home or any land upon which a trailer or mobile manufactured home is used or stands;
- (2) "Covered matter" means any notice to quit delivered to, or any summary process action instituted against, a covered individual pursuant to chapter 832 or chapter 412 of the general statutes or any administrative proceeding against a covered individual necessary to preserve a state or federal housing subsidy or to prevent a proposed termination of the lease;
- (3) "Designated organization" means any not-for-profit legal services organization that provides legal representation in a covered matter to a covered individual;
- (4) "Administering entity" means the organization contracted by or party to a memorandum of agreement with the Judicial Branch to administer the right to counsel program in accordance with subsection (b) of this section;
- (5) "Legal representation" means representation in a covered matter provided by a designated organization to a covered individual, and all legal advice, advocacy and assistance associated with such representation, subject to and in accordance with the Rules of Professional Conduct;
- (6) "Income-eligible" means (A) having household income at or below eighty per cent of the state median income adjusted for family size, as determined by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, at the time of the request for

representation; or (B) receiving one of the following types of public assistance: (i) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, (ii) Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, (iii) Medicaid, (iv) Supplemental Security Income, (v) refugee resettlement benefits, (vi) rental assistance under chapter 138a of the general statutes, or (vii) the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program, 42 USC 1437f(o);

- (7) "Tenant", "landlord", "owner" and "dwelling unit" have the same meanings as provided in section 47a-1 of the general statutes;
- (8) "Notice to quit" means any notice to quit possession or occupancy delivered pursuant to chapter 832 or chapter 412 of the general statutes to a lessee or occupant;
- (9) "Lessee or occupant" means any tenant, lessee or occupant, for residential purposes, of any land or building, apartment in any building, dwelling unit, trailer or mobile manufactured home, or land upon which a trailer or mobile manufactured home is used or stands; and
- (10) "Right to counsel program" means the state-wide right to counsel program to provide legal representation to a covered individual in a covered matter established under this section.
- (b) There is established a right to counsel program for the purpose of providing any covered individual with legal representation at no cost in a covered matter initiated on or after July 1, 2021. The Judicial Branch shall, using available federal funds, contract with or enter a memorandum of agreement with an administering entity to administer the right to counsel program. The administering entity, within the funding available to it for the right to counsel program, shall fund the provision of legal representation by designated organizations under this section. A designated organization may subcontract with a nonprofit or community organization to provide legal representation to a covered individual, and to provide tenant outreach and education. A designated organization shall, at a minimum: (1) Have substantial expertise in housing law and landlord tenant law and substantial experience furnishing free legal assistance to eligible individuals; (2) have a demonstrated history of serving the low-income community; (3) identify the geographic area in which such organization provides legal representation; (4) have a plan to reach and provide legal representation to incomeeligible persons with limited English proficiency; and (5) provide appropriate supervision and training.

- (c) The administering entity may receive funds or services from the state or federal government, corporations, associations or individuals to fund: (1) The provision of legal representation to covered individuals in covered matters; (2) the administration of the right to counsel program for the administering entity and designated organizations; and (3) tenant outreach and education.
- (d) If the Judicial Branch receives state or federal funds pursuant to this section for the purpose of appointing additional housing mediators under section 47a-69 of the general statutes, the Judicial Branch shall appoint such additional housing mediators to facilitate the resolution of summary process actions.
- (e) (1) There is established a working group to advise on matters and policies affecting the right to counsel program, to effectuate the right to counsel. The working group shall consist of the following members:
 - (A) Two appointed by the speaker of the House of Representatives;
 - (B) Two appointed by the president pro tempore of the Senate;
 - (C) One appointed by the majority leader of the House of Representatives;
 - (D) One appointed by the majority leader of the Senate;
 - (E) One appointed by the minority leader of the House of Representatives;
 - (F) One appointed by the minority leader of the Senate;
 - (G) The Commissioner of Housing, or the commissioner's designee;
 - (H) A representative of the administering entity; and
 - (I) A representative of the Judicial Branch.
- (2) All initial appointments to the working group shall be made not later than thirty days after the effective date of this section. Members shall serve for a term of four years and may be reappointed or continue to serve until such member's successor is appointed. Any vacancy shall be filled by the appointing authority.
- (3) The Commissioner of Housing, or the commissioner's designee, shall serve as chairperson of the working group. Such chairperson shall schedule the first meeting of

the working group, which shall be held not later than sixty days after the effective date of this section. The chairperson shall convene the working group on a regular basis, but not less than three times per year.

- (4) The Department of Housing shall provide administrative support to the working group.
- (f) (1) The Judicial Branch, in consultation with the administering entity, working group and designated organizations, shall approve a one-page plain-language notice to inform a tenant of the rights under the right to counsel program. Not later than October 1, 2021, such notice shall be made available on the Judicial Branch's Internet web site and available to the public. Such notice shall include a phone number for accessing information and applying for assistance.
- (2) On and after October 1, 2021, an owner, lessor, landlord, legal representative or agent of an owner, lessor or landlord, a housing authority or a housing subsidy program administrator, as applicable, shall attach a copy of the notice described under subdivision (1) of this subsection, to (A) a notice to quit delivered to a covered individual pursuant to chapter 832 or chapter 412 of the general statutes; (B) a summons and complaint for a summary process action pursuant to chapter 832 or chapter 412 of the general statutes; (C) a lease termination notice for a public or subsidized housing unit; and (D) a notice to terminate a state or federal housing subsidy.
- (3) Any court notice scheduling a mediation or hearing that is sent to a self-represented party in a covered matter shall include plain language information about the availability of legal representation through the right to counsel program and a phone number for accessing information and applying for assistance.
- (g) The administering entity, in consultation with the working group and designated organizations, shall determine how to phase in the right to counsel program based on all relevant factors, including, but not limited to: (1) The prioritization of certain groups of individuals by income, zip codes, census tracts or other priority criteria developed in consultation with the designated organizations and the working group; (2) the availability of program funding; (3) the number of trained legal services attorneys available to provide legal representation; and (4) the scope of the need for legal representation.
 - (h) Nothing in this section shall be construed to establish any right enforceable by a

covered individual against a designated organization or the administering entity.

(i) Not later than January 1, 2023, and annually thereafter, the administering entity shall submit a report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to housing and the Judicial Department. Such report shall include the following information: (1) The number of covered individuals provided legal representation pursuant to this section; (2) the extent of legal representation provided; (3) any outcomes achieved, such as the rates of tenant representation, tenant retention of housing or other appropriate outcome measures; and (4) the engagement and education of tenants.

APPENDIX C

Notice to Tenants

The State of Connecticut is in the process of creating an eviction right to counsel program for income eligible tenants facing eviction or the loss of their housing subsidy.

This program has not opened yet. It will be phased in over time. The first phase of the program is expected to open in January 2022. For more information about the program, call 1-800-559-1565 or visit www.EvictionHelpCT.org.

You are receiving this notice because you are facing the loss of your apartment or housing subsidy. The following free resources are currently available:

- www.CTLawHelp.org: Visit <u>www.CTLawHelp.org/eviction</u> for information about the eviction process and how to respond to eviction papers.
- UniteCT Rental Assistance: Apply for rental assistance from the state's UniteCT program by
 going to www.bit.ly/UniteCT (or call 1-844-864-8328 for a referral to a community agency that
 can help you apply).
- United Way 2-1-1 Helpline: There may be additional housing, utility, and food assistance available in your community. Call 2-1-1 or go to www.211ct.org for more information and referrals.

Notificación al inquilino

El estado de Connecticut está en proceso de crear un programa de derecho a la asistencia de un abogado en casos de desahucio para inquilinos que reúnan ciertos requisitos de nivel de ingresos y que se encuentren en riesgo de desahucio o de pérdida del subsidio de vivienda.

Este programa aún no está disponible y será implementado gradualmente. Se espera que la primera fase del programa comience en enero de 2022. Para más información acerca del programa, llame al 1-800-559-1565 o visite www.EvictionHelpCT.org.

Usted ha recibido este aviso porque está en riesgo de perder su apartamento o subsidio de vivienda. Los siguientes recursos gratuitos ya están disponibles:

- www.CTLawHelp.org: Para obtener información sobre el proceso de desahucio y cómo responder al recibir los documentos de desahucio visite la página www.CTLawHelp.org/eviction.
- Asistencia de alquiler de UniteCT: Solicite asistencia de alquiler del programa estatal UniteCT, visitando la página <u>www.bit.ly/UniteCT</u> (o llame al 1-844-864-8328 para ser derivado a una agencia comunitaria que pueda ayudarle con la solicitud).
- Línea de ayuda de United Way 2-1-1: Pueden existir otros tipos de ayuda disponibles con de vivienda, servicios públicos y alimentos en su comunidad. Para más información y derivaciones a otros servicios llame al 2-1-1 o visite www.21lct.org.

APPENDIX D

Recommendation of the Forms Committee for modification of the summary process answer form

- Add a new answer option (inserted as "c") concerning waiver: "The landlord accepted rent or otherwise waived the Notice to Quit after I received it." Re-letter the remaining answer boxes accordingly.
- Replace the catch-all which says "Additional Information" with a box "k" reading as follows: "Additional reasons why I should not be evicted." The catch-all should be phrased as a defense (most likely an equitable defense) and not as merely extra information.

SUMMARY PROCESS (EVICTION) ANSWER TO COMPLAINT JD-HM-5 Rev, 8-19 C.G.S. §§ 47a-4a, 47a-5, 47a-7, 47a-15, 47a-20, 47a-20e, 47a-23c, 47a-33, 47a-57, 49-31p

This form is available in other language(s).

ADA NOTICE
The Judicial Branch of the State of Connecticut complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need a reasonable accommodation in accordance with the ADA, contact a court clerk or an ADA contact person listed at www.jud.ct.gow/ADA.



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ANSWER	ASD

Name of case	
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Judicial District Housing Session	and the state of t
Section 1 — Summary Process (Eviction) Answer For each numbered paragraph of the landlord's Complaint, set 1. Agree Disagree Do Not Know 2. Agree Disagree Do Not Know 3. Agree Disagree Do Not Know 4. Agree Disagree Do Not Know 4. Agree Disagree Do Not Know 5. Cection 2 — Special Defenses (Facts showing the count to all the special defenses listed below may apply to the reason(stotal little special defenses that show the count that the plaintiful 6. All rent has been paid to my landlord. 6. Rent was offered to my landlord on (date): 7. The landlord accepted rent or otherwise waived the No rent is due under Connecticut law because of hore to complain about my apartment. 8. I filled a rent increase complaint with the Fair Rent Committed in a building or complex with 5 units or more or in a mill live in a building or complex with 5 units or more or in a mill lam 62 years old or older, or my spouse, sibling, parent or grandparent is 62 years	Section Sect
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