Hello Senator Rahman, Representative DeGraw and members of the Planning & Development Committee.

My name is Justin Elicker, and I am the Mayor of New Haven. I am here to speak in support of HB 6391 AN ACT INCREASING PENALTIES FOR THE VIOLATION OF MUNICIPAL ORDINANCES.

In New Haven we work hard to ensure residents and businesses comply with city ordinances and state statutes to ensure the safety, wellbeing, and quality of life that everyone in our community deserves. While our goal is to ensure compliance, at times certain individuals or businesses violate the law and it is our work to bring them into compliance. Generally people or businesses will work collaboratively with us, however at times there is a reluctance to do so. Penalties in the form of fines are a necessary tool that the City uses to ensure compliance when collaboration no longer works.

Currently, state statute restricts municipalities from implementing a fine of over $250. Our understanding is this amount was approved by the State legislature in 2006. With rising costs driven by inflation over these past 16 years, the $250 fine is no longer significant enough to deter the most egregious, repeat violators from violating the law.

An increase ceiling for fines municipalities could choose to enact to $1,000 would allow a graduated penalty and help us modify behavior to ensure better compliance with the law and a better lifestyle for New Haven residents. Our intention, as it always has been, is to give violators the support they need to come into compliance, and only when that is not successful would we implement fines on a graduated increasing scale.
Our challenges are particularly acute with violations of the housing code. While the majority of landlords comply with the law and provide safe environments for renters, there are some who consistently and repeatedly violate city law and create unsafe and deplorable environments for tenants. From rodents to mold to broken plumbing to broken heating systems, our housing inspectors see repeat violations and an unwillingness of certain landlords to address the problem. Our assessment is that some large companies see paying fines simply as the cost of doing business and deliberately fail to fix problems, because the savings of not addressing housing issues is more than the cost of the small fines they potentially could incur. This must change. Giving municipalities the option to increase fines after repeat offenses to $1,000 will give us the tools to hold companies accountable when all other options fail.

We urge your support of this legislation. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Justin Elicker
Mayor, City of New Haven