Testimony Regarding

H.B. 6391: An Act Increasing Penalties for the Violation of Municipal Ordinances

Joint Committee on Planning and Development
February 17, 2023

Dear Senator Rahman, Representative Kavros DeGraw, Senator Needleman, Representative Chafee, Senator Fazio, Representative Zullo, and esteemed members of the Planning and Development Committee:

My name is Eli Sabin, and I am testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that one day Connecticut is a thriving and equitable state where all children achieve their full potential.

Connecticut Voices for Children is testifying in support of

H.B. 6391: An Act Increasing Penalties for the Violation of Municipal Ordinances

Connecticut Voices for Children supports H.B. 6391: An Act Increasing Penalties for the Violation of Municipal Ordinances because it will help municipalities enforce important local laws, including the housing codes that help ensure residents have the safe, quality housing they deserve.

Over the last several years, landlords across Connecticut have been taken to criminal court on charges of violating local housing codes. In many of these cases, the landlords have pled guilty and then paid the maximum fine of $250 per violation, which is set under CT Gen Stat § 7-148 § (10) (A). This $250 maximum is the same for all municipal fines, unless otherwise specified in state statute, and was changed to $250—from $100—in 2003.

Because this fine is so low, many landlords appear to be comfortable paying the fine rather than doing proper and consistent maintenance, creating unsafe living conditions for tenants.

For example, in August 2022, Shmuel Aizenberg, the owner of the New Haven-based Ocean Management real estate company, paid a total fine of $2,500 for housing code violations in 10 of Ocean’s units. The violations included allowing “holes in the bathroom ceiling, a leaking bathroom ceiling, and loose and falling ceiling tiles in the bathroom” of one apartment and “a damp, bulging and badly stained bedroom ceiling, a ceiling in danger of collapse, loose kitchen ceiling tiles, a bathroom ceiling with mold throughout, a bathroom ceiling in danger of collapse, and defective gutters” at another, according to the New Haven Independent. Aizenberg had paid $3,750 in fines for 15 similar violations in May 2022 and $500 for two others in October 2021, demonstrating that these fines are not a significant deterrent for landlords who do not fulfill their
maintenance obligations, especially given that municipalities frequently do not have enough staff capacity to inspect the thousands of local rental properties where housing code violations may exist.

Raising the maximum fine for local ordinances from $250 to $1,000 would protect tenants and give municipalities a greater ability to enforce their laws. The value of the $250 maximum fine has eroded greatly due to inflation since it was established in 2003, and it is time to increase it to empower municipalities and ensure local ordinances such as housing codes are followed.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Eli Sabin
Legislative Coordinator
Connecticut Voices for Children