PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

Partnership for Strong Communities promotes equitable change in Connecticut housing policy by coordinating advocacy, advancing research, and uniting diverse partners

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
MARCH 3, 2026

Representative Felipe, Senator Marx, Representative Scott, Senator Sampson and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for S.B. 334 *"An Act Concerning the Composition of Fair Rent Commissions."* I am Alysha Gardner, Senior Policy Analyst with the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are a statewide nonprofit research, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring everyone in Connecticut has a safe, stable home that is affordable to them in an equitable community of their choice.

We respectfully request that the committee OPPOSE S.B. 334.

S.B. 334 creates a new state mandate for municipal Fair Rent Commissions (FRCs) by dictating the makeup of the Commission to be 50% landlords and 50% tenants. We believe this mandate is antithetical to the goal of FRCs, which seeks to allow volunteer community members to meet an determine whether a rent increase is to be considered "harsh and unconscionable," (CT Statute 7-148c). **This bill would exclude a key community group from participating in Fair Rent Commissions: homeowners who are neither landlords nor tenants.**

In a Partnership event last summer, Fair Rent Commissions in Action, panelists shared their perspective on the role of FRCs in tenant-landlord relationships:

> *"Fair Rent Commissions are totally unique to Connecticut; they've been allowed since 1969 to provide what's basically individualized rent stabilization to tenants at the local level. The idea is that they function as the conscience of the community… That people who live in a municipality can develop a shared understanding of what is and is not done there." – Sarah White, CT Fair Housing Center*

> *"I like what [Sarah] said about being the conscience of the community, because we are lay people, we're not attorneys, we're not professional advocates or anything like that… We are inclined to look at what is fair, what is reasonable, what is the human impact of something that we see." – Peter Cunningham, Chair of Hamden Fair Rent Commission*

As described above, FRCs are the conscience of the community and rely upon participation from all community members to make fair rulings for involved parties.

Municipalities recognize that diverse perspectives are needed, and many have already imposed FRC composition requirements which would be invalidated by this bill. Some common ordinances we see require that a certain number of Commission positions be filled by individuals of different political parties. **Landlords and tenants are already often required to be represented in FRCs, typically in equal number, but are not required to be the sole makeup of the Commission.** In all cases, the municipality itself is empowered to make these decisions locally.

Apart from considerations on the role of FRCs, **this bill would impose real practical constraints on a municipality's ability to staff a Commission**. As of July 2025, twenty FRCs (40%) had at least one vacancy. Five FRCs (10%) had more vacant than filled positions. Municipalities across the state have expressed challenges in finding enough volunteers to adequately staff their FRCs, though the challenge is not unique to FRCs and has been a growing trend across many municipal-level volunteer opportunities. By further restricting membership to a very narrow group (tenants and landlords) while excluding the largest community group (homeowners), this bill would make it nearly impossible to staff and operate FRCs.

Fair Rent Commissions are an important policy tool to support housing affordability and stability for all Connecticut residents. We oppose any bill that will weaken a municipality's ability to promptly respond to housing crises within their jurisdiction and request the members of the Housing Committee not support S.B. 334.

Respectfully,

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Partnership for Strong Communities