

Good Morning Madam Chair and members of the Gov Ops Committee,

Thank you for giving me a few minutes to sit at this end of the table and share a little bit about my Just cause eviction story. I know the charter change you are taking testimony on will not impact my Town or my Legislative district but my experience parallels that of many, regardless of where they live.

The beginning of my story is set roughly 8 years ago when I was leaving my marriage, having hit my emotional limit with raising my sons in a dysfunctional household driven by alcoholism. We found a condo just a few miles away from the family abode. The owner of the condo was a member of the community that I had known for years and he was glad to be able to help me at an incredibly stressful time. He had a lease drawn up which included provisions that made it clear that he could sell the condo and would give me 3 months notice to vacate. At the time the real estate market was sluggish at best. We never renewed the lease but when all was said and done I had lived there for almost seven years.

My landlord and I always had a good relationship. I paid my rent every month. He was always responsive when an issue came up, which wasn't often. Lines of communication were always open between us. That feels important to share as I don't think any of how my tenancy ended was personal or with just cause. In fact, over the years we would often discuss his selling the condo to me. If I could have made that happen I would have years ago. Unfortunately, a snafu in my divorce decree has led to my name STILL being on the mortgage for the house I no longer own post divorce. Despite taking subsequent legal action to try to remedy that situation, that mortgage is still a financial stumbling block for me.

For those of you who don't know what I do outside of the Statehouse, I have served as Londonderry's Town Clerk for almost 10 years. Part of my work day includes following land transactions. I started seeing the Covid real estate boom before most people knew what was going on. After a few weeks of watching sales roll in 30-40% above appraised value I actually called my landlord and told him I would need significant notice if he decided to sell the condo in this market. There are not many long term rentals available in our resort driven community and I knew it would be nearly impossible to find a new place to live. He told me not to worry. So I didn't.

Months went by. On the Friday evening of Memorial Day weekend my landlord called out of the blue. I was on my way out of Town for the holiday weekend. He said one of the other condo owners at the complex had expressed an interest in buying his condo and he wanted to walk them through the place tomorrow. I said no. I was away for the weekend and we could discuss a real estate showing when I got home. I began panicking immediately and made a few phone calls over the weekend to inquire about other long term rentals I was aware of. When I got home my landlord and I had a long phone conversation where he told me not to worry and I told him I couldn't NOT worry until I knew he wasn't going to sell the condo. I continued to look for other places to live and tried to keep him informed about my progress. After a few weeks he stopped responding to my texts or emails. On July 1 I got a letter in the mail from him. For personal reasons, he needed us to vacate the property within 90 days.

We had friends who owned a camp in Town and they had offered to let the kids and me stay there until the cold weather arrived. The camp had electricity and running water but no heat source, hot water or internet connection. Cell service was spotty at best. Fortunately my family camps a lot and for the summer months I knew we would enjoy being there. Plus I could save some money which would make it easier to have first month, last month and security deposit when I did sign a new lease. I'll also admit to being very angry and didn't want to write another rent check after getting a hollow letter in the mail evicting my family.

I continued my search for a new place to rent. There were VERY few long term rental options available. The only place I found on Craig's list was currently occupied and the owners were waiting for the eviction moratorium to be lifted. One other option was being vacated because the rent had just been increased and unfortunately that made it unaffordable for me as well. One option was a three season cabin whose owner very generously offered to help me winterize the place but after testing that option for feasibility it became clear I needed to keep looking. I called owners of properties that I knew were sitting vacant. One such property seemed the most promising but required a lot of work. If I could get the place cleaned out (which required at least one 30 yard dumpster) the property owner would work with me to have the kids and me live there while additional renovations were done. We got so far as to clean the place out and then progress stalled. Contractors were not available to do the additional work that was needed. After repeated requests to discuss terms of a lease never moved the issue forward I decided I should keep looking.

Sometime in August I caught wind of a long term rental that was opening up. I heard about it through a fellow municipal official and fortunately the landlord was someone I had touched base with previously in my search. He was not surprised to get my call. Everyone in Town knew I didn't have a long term place to live yet. Friends and relative strangers alike would send me leads on places. I followed up on nearly all of them. It took up A LOT of time and energy.

So, this new place was going to work out. The space was big enough for the three of us if the boys shared the bigger bedroom and it was in Londonderry, which allowed me to remain in both the Legislature and the Town Office. I would have signed the lease sight unseen if I could have.

Unfortunately there was yet another snag. The property owner wanted to have the place in tip top shape when we moved in which shouldn't have taken long. But there was 1 leaky pipe that required a plumber and all of the connections and friendships with plumbers in Town were not enough to get someone to show up and fix the leak. All the contractors that both the landlord and I knew were so booked up that doing this very small job was just not a priority. So we waited patiently and called in a favor or two. It would be November 1st before we moved in.

My family camping adventure was fun until school started and the weather turned. My boys wanted stability and to be able to take a hot shower after sports practices. We had been cooking outdoors for the bulk of the summer which was a luxury that the school year did not allow for. Doing laundry became a burden. Laundromats do not exist in my immediate area and we were relying on friends and family for washers and dryers. We toughed out the camp until it got uncomfortably cold. Then we left our cats there (yes,

we had two cats with us) and we switched to couch surfing. We would visit the cats daily but they were not happy with us. We were extremely lucky to have family and friends more than willing to take in the three humans until that darn pipe was fixed.

So we are in a good place now. Which, anecdotally, is not the norm in my community. Many families of renters have needed to leave our school district or move back in with family to be able to stay. I know I am not the only tenant in good standing that got an eviction notice because of a desire to sell a property at top dollar without a pesky tenant in it. Community members would stop me in the grocery store or at the bank to tell me their stories. It was heartbreaking and exhausting mostly because there was nothing anyone, including me, could do to help.

The just cause provisions of this charter change are needed. I hope that this is the beginning of a Statewide conversation about this issue. Without cause, 60 or 90 days notice to vacate is not sufficient in a rental landscape with very little inventory. There is simply not enough housing to go around. Drastic rent increases without justification should not be used as a tactic to push people out of their homes. We are seeing our communities hollowed out thanks to real estate speculation disguised as progress. Vermont renters need protections if we want to keep them living in Vermont.

I thank you for your time and attention.