

**FOR THURSDAY'S TESTIMONY - April, 22, 2021**

Good morning. I'm Jude Hawkens and we live in South Londonderry, VT. First, thank you for the opportunity to present our side of how the eviction moratorium has benefitted us and kept us safe. As tenants in the state of VT – the eviction moratorium helped us. Let me explain. But before I give my written statement – I'd like to make some comments about the landlord testimony on April 9<sup>th</sup>.

I found that the majority of their testimony had very little to do with the pandemic – and more about more common issues between landlord and tenants, not paying rent, destruction of property, deadbeat tenants, basically – bad tenants. These issues were around long before Covid-19. The reason for the moratorium was not put in place here and around the country to address these issues. The reason for the moratorium was for safety, not spreading this disease. The reason for the moratorium was for protection of our citizens. We all know, there are always people that will take advantage of the system – no matter the tax bracket.

We are not this kind of tenant, very much the opposite – and that is why I am pleased to give my testimony and another side of the story.

We all know, simply put, if there wasn't a pandemic, there would not be a moratorium.

Now - my statement.

- My wife and I moved to VT in 2010 and rented this home in South Londonderry, VT. The landlord had just finished some renovations after having some issues with tenants the previous year.
- We've always had a good relationship with our landlord – and he has commented how grateful he was having us as renters. If there were any issues with this old farmhouse – and there were – either he or we would address them. It had always been a win-win for both tenant and landlord.
- For over ten years – we always paid our rent on time or in advance – with the total amount being well over north of \$120,000 – a substantial amount, especially in this area of Vermont.
- Our photography business has been our main source of income for many years – prior to and during our tenancy here in Vermont. We've always been self-employed and thankfully have done very well. At the end of 2019 – we began investing and branching off into a new business.

## Correspondence

- Then 2020 and COVID hit. The event business was decimated. We had no weddings, portrait sessions or commercial projects and zero chance for work into the unseen future which continues to this day. Our new business was devastated as well by the COVID pandemic. Everything was and has been put on hold. We paid what rent we could until we received VT Rental assistance. A life saver – especially for two independent people never being on any kind of assistance before.
- Before we knew about rental assistance and after paying rent faithfully for ten years and being excellent tenants, and having a great relationship with our landlord - we received a threatening letter from our landlord's attorney – after just a little over a month of making payments as we could – never falling behind more than 50% of the rent owed for only three months.
- We understood our rights and knew about the eviction moratorium in place here in VT – and with the help of an attorney at VT Legal Aid – we addressed the situation with our landlord and things settled down.
- After being here and knowing we had invested in having a “safe” place to live during the pandemic – it has been unsettling knowing no matter how we proved ourselves over the years – the specter of being evicted was and is ever present. Our landlord is still trying to get us to leave before it is safe.
- One of the only things that gave us piece of mind was knowing we wouldn't be 'tossed out' into an unsafe, uncertain and very possibly dangerous environment. Our landlord had been made whole with rent in 2020 – and as soon as the Rental Assistance program begins for 2021– he will be again.
- But here we all are in April of 2021 – understandably – we have the promise of the vaccines working - but we live in a careless society and a fourth wave is looming – with more contagious and deadly variants.
- And on top of all of it – the real estate market and rental market has gone crazy, sparse and over inflated. Under normal circumstances – we understand we would accommodate our landlord in whatever his plans might be 'for what has been our home', but it is clearly egregious and unjust under the current circumstances why hardworking, conscientious people who have fallen on difficult times because of the pandemic - should be forced out during a pandemic.
- The eviction moratorium should stay in place until it is safe to find a new place for us and many renters, both from a position financially and safety during this health crisis. No one wants

to be in this position – but we are all trying our best to make it work and we need your continued assistance.

I personally would like to thank you for holding these hearings – and as tenants, we care about what you are doing – and we understand – it is a balance of the needs of both the tenants and landlords.

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Now there most likely is another piece of this puzzle at play...

Notes/quotes from a NY Times article- 4.17.21 written by Ron Lieber

TITLED: Realtors Want to Sell You a Home. Their Trade Group Backs Evicting Others.

The National Association of Realtors ( the N.A.R.) is advocating an end to a pandemic-era order meant to keep renters in their homes.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/17/your-money/realtors-pandemic-eviction-ban.html?referringSource=articleShare>

“Some of the same people in charge of selling you a home have sued to make it easier to evict people from one.”

“Our protagonist in this tale, the N.A.R., [spends more money](#) on federal lobbying than any other entity, according to the Center for Responsive for Politics.”

“And among those million-plus members, according to the association, about 38 percent of Realtors own at least one rental property. Now is their opposition to an eviction ban beginning to make sense? The N.A.R. isn’t shy about this, stating on the [lobbying section](#) of its website that it wants to ‘protect property interests’.”

“We could just as easily call it the National Association for Landlords.”

“Broad, nationwide, blanket eviction moratoriums do not serve the purpose they did when first enacted last year,” the N.A.R. spokesman, Wes Shaw, said in another emailed statement. “If these property owners are put in a position where they can no longer justify or properly maintain operations, every tenant in the property would be left without a proper home and the supply of affordable housing would shrink as more and more units went off the market.”

In a seemingly sarcastic quote from the article...

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“If you buy the argument that evictions during a pandemic are necessary to preserve affordable housing, hire yourself some Realtors straightaway.”

“But if it makes you queasy, ask the ones you’re interviewing where they stand on the matter. Enough questions from people with hot properties to sell just might make them feel nauseous, too. At the National Association for Landlords, those sales agents’ opinions seem to matter a lot more than yours.”

I will make this statement available to you – and send this in written form to Ron Wild.