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From: Helen Zamora - Bustos <helen@wotsnj.org>
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To: Comments Mailbox
Subject: [External]Landlord Tenant Proposal Comments
Attachments: Community Tenant's Comments.pdf

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My name is Helen Zamora-Bustos and I work as an Organizer for Wind Of The Spirit, Immigrant Resource Center. Attached you will find our Comments on the Landlord Tenants Proposal.

Thank you

I am Helen Zamora-Bustos, Policy and Community Organizer at Wind of the Spirit. Wind Of The Spirit (WOTS), Immigrant Resource Center, is a faith-based organization moved by the tradition of hospitality. We strive to create an environment free of discrimination. At our core, we are motivated to act by the challenges that immigrants in the United States continue to face. Wind of the Spirit works with immigrant communities to ensure their access to information that will strengthen their leadership and allow them to realize their power as social and political actors. We currently support communities in Morris, Sussex, Union and Somerset County. With our mission in mind, we have begun and/or been part of major organizing and advocacy campaigns, provide immigration related legal services, and run a youth leadership campaign focusing on non-violence.

Our members and the communities we work with are directly affected by the proposed changes in landlord tenant court procedures and processes in outlined in Maintaining Our Communities: Report of the Judiciary Special Committee on Landlord Tenant. We wish to focus our comments specifically on our concerns about technology, accessibility and resources.

The Special Committee recommendations number 5, 8, and 11, all rely on expanded use of virtual, by video, appearances by tenants instead of in person appearances. The Special Committee notes that aAccessibility to technology is a major concern in the community and recognized the “digital divide.” (Report at 13) As acknowledged in the

report, a flood of eviction cases is expected to occur at the end of the Governor's pandemic related eviction moratorium.

This will affect individuals from various backgrounds, but will be felt most strongly in the communities WOTS works in. We remain concerned that without the courts actively providing technical support and access, many non-English speaking and lower income individuals we work with will not have meaningful access to the proposed cases, conferences, mediations and even trials if done virtually. Our experience in meeting with our community members is that they don't have access to or basic understanding of Zoom or any other online tool that serves the same purpose. They mostly rely on telephones, have access to or basic understanding of Zoom or any other online tool that serves the same purpose. They mostly rely on telephones. These technological impediments are complicated by language limitations.

For example, it is not uncommon for elderly immigrants to turn to family members for help for both language interpretation and assistance in accessing technology, but well-meaning friends and relatives may themselves have limited language and technology skills.

We know a 67-year-old male in the town of Morristown is constantly concerned with the heavy burden carried by his children on whom he depends on for assistance for everything related with technology. He has had a phone for the last 7 years and two email addresses. However, he still needs assistance from his children, both under the age of 17, to check his emails and respond to them when needed. His lack of technology and language skills have greatly affected him as he sought aid for his rental

needs during the pandemic, always regretful that his children are forced to share his fears of eviction. A person in his situation would have significant difficulty managing video appearances and interacting with the proposed Landlord Tenant Specialist. This is a perfect recipe for disaster. Unless the courts ensure resources be made available for such individuals, such as expanded access to court provided technology, ensuring proper language interpretation at each contact with the court, and that court procedures appropriately accommodate such difficulties.

These are just a few of the very real experiences and needs among the immigrant community facing the possibility of eviction, especially after Covid-19 has presented so much difficulty.

It is imperative that in legal matters of such import, where someone could lose their home, the right supportive services be provided. It is also important, as well as a list of recommendations and resources for tenants who may otherwise not be aware of their existence.