



**Center for Justice Reform Clinic
Vermont Law and Graduate School**

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House Committee on General and Housing

115 State Street

Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

House Committee Members,

My name is Brett Stokes and I am the Director of the Center for Justice Reform Clinic at Vermont Law and Graduate School. I feel privileged to write to you all now to provide written testimony in support for a proposal to expand housing access to immigrant families in Vermont. I urge all of you to please vote in support of H.169 to advance this critical proposal and advocate for fair housing practices in support of our noncitizen community members.

I have been an immigration defense practitioner for nearly a decade. Since joining Vermont Law and Graduate School faculty in July of 2022, I have worked to support the immigration related rights of hundreds of noncitizens in Vermont. All of my client's cases and backgrounds are different. However, one common struggle that many of the clinic's clients face is fair access to housing.

While every single one of my clients wishes to work to support themselves, their families, and contribute to their communities through the payment of taxes, this is difficult for many as the process of successfully receiving work authorization becomes more onerous and marred by administrative delays. This limited access to work authorization and social security numbers affects many noncitizens' abilities to not only make ends meet, it forecloses the ability to access many essential benefits that citizens may take for granted. This includes ability to open a bank account, apply for a loan, or in many cases even lease an apartment.

I support H.169 because it gives our noncitizen community members better opportunities to ensure that themselves and their families are sheltered. For my clients – many of whom have made the difficult decision to leave their home countries for fear that if they did not they could be at risk of harm or worse – the passage of this bill may be the difference between having a place to call home and home insecurity or homelessness.

In the current political climate, with mounting attacks against immigrant rights in this country, the issue is critical and urgent. Now more than ever Vermont should take a stand to support noncitizens and join the ranks of the others states in the Union that have made similar decisions. Please support H.169 to advance this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Brett Stokes, Esq.

Director, Center for Justice Reform Clinic
Vermont Law and Graduate School