

February 22, 2007

Dear Senator Harris and Representative Villano and Members of the Committee on Human Services:

I am Tom Hyland, Executive Director of Martin House Inc. in Norwich. Martin House is a 55 person residential program for people in need. We provide dignified housing, three nutritious meals daily, support services, and a caring community for those who previously were alone, alienated, fearful, and dispossessed. The majority of those we serve have histories of mental illness and / or addictions. I ask your support for H. B. No. 6650, which authorizes state bonds to renovate a floor in a state owned building on the Uncas on Thames campus, also in Norwich. The area to be renovated is in the front part of the building in which we presently occupy the back. We propose to create 17 efficiency units of affordable housing for people of low income. H.B No. 6650 seeks one million one hundred thousand dollars to create these units, which is less than \$65,000 per unit.

Two years ago the city of Norwich inspectors condemned one condominium unit and issued a violation to the owner of another unit at a newly constructed condominium development that had been open only a few months. The two condo owners chopped up their newly constructed dwellings into smaller units in order to create illegal apartments. The owners were constructing illegal bedrooms and bathrooms in the garage and living room areas of their condos. Why? We have a housing crisis in southeastern Connecticut in part because of the influx of casino employees. Someone will even rent a room in your garage--legally or illegally—because there is nowhere else to go. Throughout the region, people are hotbedding, i.e. different people share the same bed in 8 hour shifts.

The law of supply and demand is at work. Because of the shortage of housing, affordability has become a huge problem. For people of low income, it has become a crisis. The analysis of housing needs conducted by the Southeastern Connecticut Council of Governments that was released in 2002 clearly stated statistically the housing burden our region is under and will continue to be under for many, many years.

Martin House has provided dignified and effective residential services to people in need for over 24 years. I have been the executive director for all those years, have served on the Board of Directors and as President of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, have served on the Board of Directors of the Connecticut Housing Coalition, presently serve on the statewide Steering Committee of the Partnership for Strong Communities Reaching Home supportive housing campaign, and I am a member of the town of Stonington Affordable Housing Committee appointed by the selectmen.

I ask you to support H.B. No. 6650 to provide affordable housing through an organization that has a proven track record in a region of the state that is being strangled by a lack of housing and an absence of affordable housing. Thank you

Sincerely,
Thomas J. Hyland