



February 29, 2008

TO: Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on behalf of Bill No. 40, “An Act Concerning Supportive Housing”. My name is Fran Martin, and I am the Associate Director for the Connecticut Program of the Corporation for Supportive Housing. Fifteen years ago, CSH was invited by Governor Lowell Weicker to join what was then a uniquely defining partnership—with the State of Connecticut, the nonprofit housing and service organizations, and private philanthropy—to try a long-term approach to solving the problem of homelessness in our cities and towns.

I am here today to support Governor Rell’s continued commitment to supportive housing. This legislation authorizes the payment of debt service on up to \$35 million in bond funds that will be used to pay for the construction or renovation of 150 units of supportive housing. The Governor’s budget currently includes funding—for capital, rental subsidies and services—to create 150 new units of supportive apartments through a program called “Next Steps”. I am also here to request that you **expand the State’s investment in supportive housing by funding 650 additional units of new supportive housing over this next fiscal year.**

Since the State’s first investment in supportive housing 15 years ago, we have seen first-hand the impact of housing that is affordable and safe, linked with appropriate services, on the lives of individuals and families that have been homeless and often struggling with chronic health conditions such as mental illness or substance abuse. The Supportive Housing Demonstration Program created almost 300 affordable apartments in 6 urban communities around the state. A 3-year evaluation demonstrated more than 70% reductions in use of high-cost acute healthcare services, and increases in income, rates of employment and rebuilding of social supports.

Today we are still building on the success of that first effort—sustained by the ongoing commitment of 3 different Governors and the members of the General Assembly—and creating almost 3,000 units of supportive housing located in more than 80 communities statewide. And we’ve seen the growth of the supportive housing industry—the nonprofit social service agencies, in partnership with the housing developers that build and renovate affordable apartments. These successful partnerships are able to produce more units of housing in more communities than before. Yet, in the last three funding rounds, **more than 1,000 units of housing that would help to end homelessness were not created** due to lack of funds.

We know that homelessness is expensive. We also know from our social service and healthcare systems that there are too many persons who spend years moving from the streets to the shelters and back, cycling through emergency rooms, treatment programs and other institutions. And we know from our first statewide Point in Time count in 2007, that there were close to 1,000 households—families and individuals—who were counted on the night of January 30th and had been without a permanent home for a year or more.

The state spends, on average, \$1,187 per day for a psychiatric hospital inpatient stay, and \$588 per day for detox treatment. The cost to the state for a day of supportive housing is \$54.

The increased investment that we are requesting expands service funding for the adult behavioral health component through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services; rental assistance and service funding for families through the Department of Social Services; as well as capital funding for housing development through bonds (with the housing development managed through the CT Housing Finance Authority).

We have seen the benefits in communities small and large, as people stabilize in housing, reconnect with family, with work, and with a new set of possibilities in their life—this is what we talk about when we talk about “recovery”.

We are currently working with organizations in towns and cities around the state that have more than 300 supportive housing units in planning and are ready to apply for Next Steps funding when it becomes available. We urge your support to maintain this momentum—and to not have this next funding round be the last.

While the costs of inaction are high, the benefits of action—funding 650 units of supportive housing—are clear. Thank you again for this opportunity to speak.

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