



February 19, 2009

Testimony to Housing Committee
H.B. No. 5071 – An Act Concerning the Supportive Housing Initiative

Betsy Crum
Director of Real Estate Development
Women's Institute for Housing & Economic Development
67 Washington Street
Middletown, Connecticut 06457
860-343-9000
bcrum@wihed.org

Good afternoon, Senator Gomes, Representative Green and members of the Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today and for raising this important bill. My name is Betsy Crum, and I am the Director of Real Estate Development for the Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development. I am also a Board member of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. I am speaking to you wearing both of these hats – that of a not-for-profit housing development corporation and consultant that works in partnership with local groups to build affordable and supportive housing, and that of an advocate for ending homelessness in the cities and towns in Connecticut.

As you know, in April 2008 the state issued a Request for Proposals for Supportive Housing projects. The RFP was part of a larger strategy embraced by the State of Connecticut to end chronic homelessness by providing permanent affordable housing units that are linked with supportive services. Supportive housing has been proven locally and nationally to eliminate the cycle of homelessness and to be a cost-effective use of public resources, costing less over time than allowing people to remain homeless. In spite of the success of Supportive Housing and the Legislature's commitment to continue the program, funding was rescinded in November 2008.

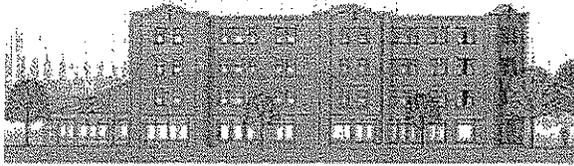
At the Women's Institute, we assisted four different organizations to develop and submit detailed, well-conceived proposals in response to the 2008 Next Steps Supportive Housing RFP. If they had all been funded, they would have provided 130 high-quality new and rehabilitated housing units for people who are currently living on the streets, in their cars, in shelters, or doubled up with other families. I would like to briefly profile these projects, each of which would have significantly benefitted their communities and could be ready to begin construction with just a few months of approval.

The Women's Institute is working with the Hartford-based non-profit, My Sister's Place, to develop a vacant "Brownfield" lot adjacent to their existing transitional housing facility in the Northend of Hartford. This project

February 19, 2009

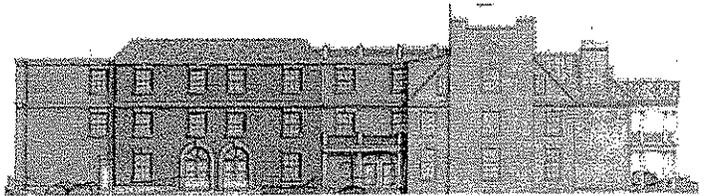
Page 2

would offer 30 one- and three-bedroom apartments for homeless individuals and families with children. The City of Hartford has fully supported this plan, and the state DEP has overseen private remediation of all environmental hazards. My Sisters' Place raised a total of \$1.5 million



toward this project, and has redesigned the building twice to reduce costs and make the most effective use of public resources. Without the Next Steps Supportive Housing funding, this project cannot move forward as supportive housing.

A second Hartford project would be located on Retreat Avenue and would provide 12 new units of permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals living with HIV/AIDS. The evolving treatment of the AIDS virus has resulted in the need for a new tier of supportive housing for those who are living with AIDS but who are at risk of relapse or re-infection. The proposed project would address this need for independent housing with flexible and responsive supportive services, as it would be developed immediately adjacent to a more intensive care facility. If funded, this project, sponsored by Hands on Hartford, would offer independence, a permanent housing option, security and continuum of services to people with HIV/AIDS would also chronically homeless. Two of the units would also be reserved for the growing population of homeless young adults with HIV/AIDS.



Begg Common, in Waterbury, is an existing state-financed elderly/disabled public housing project that is currently half-vacant due to low demand, disinvestment, and existing safety and security issues within and around the building. Without sufficient rental income, the project is operating in the red each month, unable to generate the cash flow to undertake needed repairs and security enhancements. The plan for Next Steps was to transform Begg Common into an economically viable, attractive and secure supportive housing project that would provide 72 efficiency and one-bedroom apartments for homeless individuals. Without supportive housing funding, Begg Common will likely continue to decline and eventually be taken back by the state.

The last of these "shovel ready" projects is in the borough of Jewett City. Sponsored by the American Legion Post 15, this project would offer 18 units of permanent supportive housing



for homeless and disabled veterans using the existing Post building on Main Street. The Secretary of the federal Department of Veterans' Affairs said in 2006, "The VA has no more important issue, and I mean this sincerely, than the issue of homeless veterans." The American Legion building, a former Polish Home and local landmark, has been in decline for many years.

February 19, 2009

Page 3

The funding through Next Steps would bring it back to life, which would have a significant positive impact on this Eastern Connecticut community. Perhaps more importantly, it would offer much-needed housing and services to people who have served in the armed forces and who are currently disabled and homeless. The project's future is now unknown.

We feel the impact of homelessness in our state every day. Supportive housing is an investment in our future and in our ability to thrive as an economy, as a community of people, and as a state that continues to attract and retain private sector investment and strong families and individuals. Connecticut's non-profit housing industry is ready and able to meet the challenge of building and rehabilitating our housing stock. I urge you to support HB 5071 and restore funding that will produce permanent housing for the state's most vulnerable populations.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Betsy Crum". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Betsy Crum
Director of Real Estate Development