



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

241 Main Street, 5th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106

Phone: 860-882-0236; 1-800-215-3021, Fax: 860-882-0240

E-Mail: keepthepromise@namict.org, Website: www.ctkeepthepromise.org

**Testimony before the Housing Committee
In Support of HB 5071 – An Act Concerning the Supportive Housing Initiative
February 19, 2009**

Good afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Green, and members of the Housing Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg, Coordinator of the statewide Keep the Promise Coalition which is dedicated to advocating for the “Blue Ribbon Solutions” necessary to maintain and expand critical community mental health services and housing guided by the recommendations outlined by the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Commission on mental health. The Coalition is in support of HB 5071, An Act Concerning the Supportive Housing Initiative.

Safe, affordable housing is the cornerstone of community life for all citizens. It is especially critical for people in recovery from mental illness. Many of our Coalition members live in unsafe or unacceptable living conditions simply because it is all they can afford, especially if their present situation makes working impossible. We as a society tend to blame the same people for having a mental illness or for the quality of their housing conditions: if they would only “work harder” or “pull themselves together” they would then “deserve” better housing. No one chooses to have a biologically-based brain disorder called mental illness. No one dreams about living in unsafe conditions or being homeless.

In addition, the cost of not housing people who are homeless spills over in high cost institutionalization and emergency care. Supportive housing in particular gives people with mental illnesses the opportunity to move from more restrictive and expensive settings such as residential treatment, nursing homes, and institutions or homelessness into independent, cost-effective apartments with available support services. The proven positive effects on surrounding communities, as well as the immeasurable effects of living independently with dignity, drive this evidence-

based housing option in CT and throughout the nation.

Supportive housing initiatives support families, people with low income, veterans and individuals with disabilities including mental illness. The need for permanent, safe, affordable supportive housing will only increase with the economic downturn. Failure to provide the housing will increase state costs of homelessness by three times*, critically effect people's lives, and waste time and dollars already spent planning for 150 units of "shovel ready" supportive housing to be created through Next Steps projects planned throughout the State of CT.

Finally, delay of Supportive Housing Initiatives makes no sense, even in tough budget times. Lack of housing in the mental health system only further compounds a system in a state of paralysis – beds needed for short-term inpatient care cannot be accessed because people who are waiting to be discharged cannot find any safe, affordable housing to be discharged to. The State of CT is paying an average of \$1,187.00 per day for people to receive unneeded institutional-level care or \$218 dollars per day for people to receive unneeded nursing home-level of care instead of spending \$54.00 per day for Supportive Housing in the community. It is during critical budget times such as this that we need to look at the way we are spending our dollars and make fiscally responsible changes such as investing in supportive housing. In this sense, it is an opportunity for CT to make a change from crisis-oriented care to cost-effective community care. Let's take advantage of this opportunity for change.

Thank you for your time.