

Good afternoon distinguished Chairs and members of the Committee. My name is Sharon Woodley. I am a Jewish Disabled Veteran, an advocate and an artist.

I ask you to allow the housing construction for the third round of Next Steps supportive housing to move forward immediately. The amount of funds invested by the project sponsors is \$498,500. This money, time and effort will be thrown away if you do not allow the funding for the Shovel Ready projects to go forward.

The current system of treating people who have Mental Illness is not cost effective. We do not want to continue the current system of using your tax dollars of placing them in nursing homes, state hospitals and residential homes. Many other people who suffer from Mental Illness are seen in the Hospital ER many times for urgent care because they are homeless.

I am a member of the Manchester Initiative for Supportive Housing. We are a grass roots organization trying to bring twenty units of supportive housing to Manchester. Supportive Housing combines housing and services for people diagnosed with mental illness. We not only save money but also we try to bring what money cannot buy: Human dignity.

There is an alternative to Supportive Housing for Veterans; it is called the Rocky Hill Home and Hospital. Currently, each resident costs the state over 19,000 per month. It is not a home. In order for to be a home, a Veteran must be able to join in your community's support network.

I worked for JC Penny for ten years until my own health declined, and I was forced to resign. Since I signed up during the Vietnam War, I am eligible for healthcare at the VA. When Social Security denied my claim for SSDI, I had to live at Rocky Hill Veterans Home at CT taxpayer's expense at that time of \$18,000 per month. There because I was away from my support networks, I used the hospital several times. There, I was lucky to get to religious services. Rocky Hill Veterans Home has a rule that we have to use the VA for our healthcare. I am convinced to this day; I would have lost my eyesight, had I not had the opportunity to use my choice of healthcare. I would have not had the chance to give back to my community that I am an active part of.

Supportive Housing construction has a multiplier effect in creating and preserving jobs: i.e. contractors, sub contractors, purchasing, etc. that will be spurred by the development of Supportive Housing. If we wait and do nothing we will lose our window of opportunity.

I talked to a woman yesterday, who might benefit from supportive housing. She has been trapped in a wheelchair on the second floor since October. Every time she has to go to the doctor she has to be brought down the stairs by her husband. Her doctor and her insurance company is still stalling over bring to her the supportive services she needs to stay in her own home. She confided to me that they are overwhelmed and they are not able to cope very much longer. They are not getting the services they need. Every one wants to shift the cost of supportive services to someone else.

I call on you to make a difference. Share this with others and encourage them to do the same. Supportive Housing Units are on hold. The question is not whether we can afford this in today's economy. But rather, can we afford not to.

Sharon T. Woodley  
Manchester