

## **Homeless Shelter Support and the Deficit Mitigation Plan**

Testimony Provided on December 8, 2009 by:

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The current economic crisis has, we understand, hit the state of Connecticut and its budget very hard. This crisis has forced hard choices upon our elected officials. I want, however, to simply remind those charged with this difficult task that the current economic crisis has also devastated individual lives reducing increasing numbers to homelessness. Every night our emergency shelter provides a place of safety to 50 individuals. Our day time center is full with as many as 100 individuals per day coming in seeking help with shelter, housing, income supports and other services.

In our last year of operation, we provided hospitality and support to over 500 single homeless adults in New London. Our overnight shelter and daytime center are now operating year round providing homeless individuals with a place of safety and a doorway out of homelessness. Ours is an open door—the only entrance “requirement” is the ability to interact safely with others. We are serving many individuals facing serious mental health and substance abuse challenges that would bar them from many existing programs for the homeless. Working to support these individuals has helped us establish effective relationships with substance abuse treatment facilities, Mobile Outreach, L&M Hospital psychiatric services, Sound Community Services and other mental health and social service providers in our area.

State funding represents only a small fraction of our annual budget but provides an absolutely essential foundation for our operations. The remainder of our funding comes primarily from foundations, religious communities, individuals and special events. Well over one hundred volunteers extend the services we provide with a small paid staff. Each dollar in state funding leverages at least three dollars in private funding to support the homeless in our region.

We are providing the most basic safety net for hundreds of Connecticut’s most vulnerable residents. In the New London area our shelter is the last option before life on the streets. We are, for many, the only support in a desperate struggle to escape homelessness. Financing for this life saving safety net is already strained and the need is very great. We are working relentlessly to find the resources to meet this urgent need. To provide even the most basic support to our homeless neighbors we need at least the limited state funding already allocated. Emergency shelter is not the place to seek cuts, especially at this time.