

**Dream Homes Community Center
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Danbury, CT 06810
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Senator Toni Harp, Representative John Geragosiah and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee

Reference: **Proposed cuts Affordable and Supportive Housing Programs**

My name is Karl Myers and I am here to testify against the proposed cuts to Affordable and Supportive Housing Programs, in particular, the vital dollars needed for the Next Steps 3 (150 units of supportive housing) that were not included in the Governor's budget recommendations, the \$2 million that was cut from the DCF budget for a supportive housing program for families, and finally no dollars were allocated for the PILOTS affordable housing program, or the Housing Trust Fund.

I am the Program Director of Dream Homes Community Center located in Danbury. Dream Homes is the Point of Entry for people who are homeless. We work with the City of Danbury, community agencies and the towns of New Milford, New Fairfield, Redding and Ridgefield. We identify gaps in services, trends and collect demographic data using a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). We also offer families stability and advocacy coordination when faced with rental crises. Dream Homes promotes and assists individuals to become first time homebuyers and in June 2008 began operation of a Beyond Shelter CT Program.

*Dream Homes Community center is a collaboration of four non-profit agencies:
The Association of Religious Communities (ARC), The Housing Authority of the City of Danbury,
People First of CT, and Western Connecticut Association for Human Rights (WeCAHR).
The Program serves three populations in the Greater Danbury Area :
1) Point of Entry for Homeless 2) Renters, 3) First-time Home Ownership*

One of the four primary objectives of the City of Danbury's Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness is to: "Ensure that there are adequate, appropriate and sufficient services to assist homeless or at risk persons in accessing and retaining housing".

We at Dream Homes understand that in the current economic climate that tough decisions are being made by both the Governor and the legislature regarding funding, we appreciate the fact that funds to homeless shelters, transitional living programs, and services have not been further cut. We also appreciate the Governor's inclusion of the resource neutral rapid re-housing pilot in her budget recommendations. We urge the legislature to also include the resource neutral rapid re-housing pilot in their budget, as it will quickly move hundreds of families out of emergency shelters and into housing.

While the Governor and the legislature are facing hard choices, hundreds of families and individuals throughout the state are facing even harder decisions. Your decisions, here, during this budget process, however, can offer help to many and allow cities such as Danbury to continue their work to bring homeless to an end through their Ten Year Plans. Danbury alone has seen nearly an 18% increase in overall homeless in 2008 verses 2007, and a 92% increase in family homelessness. The city of Danbury is one of the most active Ten Year Plan communities in the State and if we have seen such a sharp increase in homelessness now, what can be expected this year? The numbers will only continue to rise if funding to such programs as Next Steps 3, DCF's supportive housing program for families, the PILOTS affordable housing program, and the Housing Trust Fund are not fully funded.

Housing is among one of our most basic needs and Connecticut must continue to make strong investments in housing and homelessness prevention. An investment in both emergency shelters and homeless services, as well as vital solutions to prevent

and end homelessness, are critical to ensure that our state's most vulnerable citizens are not put in further danger as we all begin to face a mounting economic crisis.

We recommend that the legislature include the recommendations from the Governor regarding funding to homeless shelters, transitional living programs, and services and include these in their version of the biennial budget.

We also urge the legislature to do all that we can to ensure that solutions to ending homelessness are given the same level of priority as the emergency shelters and homeless services that are designed to meet the increasing need. Please ensure that there are no cuts to the Housing and Homelessness line item in the DSS budget, and restore funding to Next Steps 3, PILOTS, and the Housing Trust Fund.

