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Testimony of Lisa Lacko, Beyond Shelter Coordinator
Bristol Community Organization
To: The Human Services Committee

February 5, 2009

Supporting: House Bill 5231

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and Distinguished Members of the Committee. My name is Lisa Lacko. Thank you for this opportunity to testify regarding "An Act Concerning a Pilot Program to Provide Housing to Families Seeking Emergency Shelter".

Too many families live in shelters for too long receiving services that they can access in safe, affordable housing. Many of these families could have kept their housing or been stopped at the front door of the shelter if there were financial resources available. Some families are young mothers with very young children with limited education and low income. We are seeing some new faces of homelessness, with working and middle class families also seeking emergency services.

Currently at Bristol Community Organization, we were presented with a family of five –a mother, father and three children who are on a waiting list for an affordable apartment. If they had a subsidy, rental assistance and/or a security deposit available, their stay in the homeless shelter would be decreased. A family of five often may also find difficulty accessing available shelter space. These are the real situations facing our families today.

For the past two years, I have been the Coordinator of The Beyond Shelter CT program in Bristol. My job is to assist families and individuals in their transition from homelessness to permanent housing. I'd like to tell you one story that demonstrates how the program works. I had a mother with two grade school aged children whom I met while she was living at the shelter. She had a part time job at a local fast food outlet. She had over stayed her time allowed at the local shelter – she was there over 90 days. The Department of Children and families was involved with the family because of abuse issues involving another family member. The children were acting out in school; the mother was struggling to find a safe, affordable home for her children.

As the Beyond the Shelter Coordinator, I scheduled a series of meetings with the schools, DCF, the local hospital, landlords and other local resources to discuss the case. After two months of meetings, I finally found a suitable landlord who would take a chance on renting to the family. I worked with the family to develop a budget, to access social services such as energy assistance, food stamps and health care. We raised money to get the children into a quality after school and summer program. One year later, the mother is still working, the family moved to a larger apartment and the woman is now in a healthy relationship. There is no further DCF involvement and the children are doing well in school. Beyond Shelter CT is a program that works.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.