

5229

Partnership for
Strong Communities

5231

Human Services Committee Public Hearing
February 5, 2009

Testimony Submitted by Arka Mikel, Intern and Kate Kelly, Reaching Home Campaign Manager, Partnership for Strong Communities

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and members of the Human Services Committee. My name is Arka Mikel, an intern from the UCONN School of Social Work, and I work with Kate Kelly who is the Reaching Home Campaign Manager at the Partnership for Strong Communities. The Partnership for Strong Communities is a statewide housing policy organization that advocates for effective strategies to end homelessness, produce affordable housing for all of Connecticut's residents and develop healthy and strong neighborhood.

We are writing to express our support for **H.B. No. 5229, AN ACT CONCERNING RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES LIVING IN SHELTERS IN THE CITIES OF NEW HAVEN AND HARTFORD** and **H.B. No 5231 AN ACT CONCERNING A PILOT PROJECT TO PROVIDE HOUSING TO FAMILIES SEEKING EMERGENCY SHELTER** and hope that you will support both pieces of legislation.

Regarding H.B. No. 5229, during this current economic crisis many families in Connecticut are experiencing difficulty with the skyrocketing cost of shelter and other basic needs. The lack of affordable housing in Connecticut directly contributes to the problems of family homelessness.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, in Connecticut, a household must earn \$21.11 an hour or about \$44,000.00 a year to afford a typical 2-bedroom apartment. Rental prices rose 40% between 2000 and 2007, well before the economic downturn tightened credit and caused an even more rapid rise in demand and price of rental housing. Even before the economic downturn began causing layoffs and foreclosures, 24% of Connecticut renters in 2007 were earning less than 50% of median income and spending half or more on rent.

The Connecticut 2008 Point-in-Time Count of the homeless found that 30% of those seeking shelter because of a lack of homes were employed. Additional rental assistance will help families escape homelessness and prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place.

Regarding **H.B. 5231**, in the past, our shelter system has done effective job of providing temporary housing for families but this will grow harder to do with an increasing demand on limited resources. Recent figured from many states already indicate homelessness is on the rise nationwide. At the same time, Connecticut shelters have been at full capacity this winter with their turnaway rate up 50%. In 2007 Point-in-Time Count of the

homeless found that there were 430 homeless families on January 30, 2007. In 2008 count, the number rose to 482, a 13% increase in family homelessness.

The 2009 count was concluded on January 28 and we expect to see a further rise in the number of families experiencing homelessness-this is due to:

- A shortage of rental housing that will drive up demand and cost
- A failure to create more affordable housing and supportive housing
- Foreclosures that are causing many to lose homes.

This is at a time when the state has pulled back from the creation of supportive housing and affordable rentals which is exacerbating the problem.

We urge you to support H.B. No. 5229, AN ACT CONCERNING RENTAL ASSISTANCE FOR HOMELESS FAMILIES LIVING IN SHELTERS IN THE CITIES OF NEW HAVEN AND HARTFORD. It is critical that we increase rental assistance programs. Also, please support H.B. 5231. to provide housing to families seeking emergency shelter.

Thank you for your time.