



Testimony of Carol Walter to the Committee on Human Services re: Senate Bill 820 to establish a pilot program for families seeking emergency shelter.

Senator Doyle, Representative Walker and Members of the Human Services Committee, it is my pleasure to testify before you once again regarding efforts to prevent, reduce and end family homelessness in CT. I'm Carol Walter, the Executive Director of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness, a statewide organization advancing data driven solutions to homelessness. I again would like to thank the Governor and Commissioners of DSS, DECD, DCF as well as OPM for supporting the rapid re-housing pilot in the budget recommendations for the next biennium.

There are indications of a troubling increase in the number of families with children turning to our state's emergency shelters, and in some cases far more dangerous alternatives, as they face insurmountable economic and housing related crisis. As you know, last year saw a dramatic increase of 13% in the number of households with children using our shelters on a given day, indicating a 21% increase in the number of homeless parents and children. More recently, our data has begun to indicate even more dramatic trends. In September of 2008 a stunning 30% more families and 20% more individuals were reported "turned away" from homeless shelters as the previous year. The statewide shelter occupancy rate increased to 95% this fall, a dangerously high number if you consider that any vacancies there are, are sporadic, brief and few.

CT has a unique and important opportunity. Approximately 17 million in federal stimulus funds targeted specifically to prevention and rapid re-housing will be coming to our state and a number of municipalities, just as we begin to implement the rapid re-housing initiative which is in development and supported by state government. Our Beyond Shelter, CT program-the service backbone of our proposed pilot-provides an infrastructure to get these desperately needed federal funds to the families who need them quickly with a precision



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that can assure that we put resources to effective use. Our HUD mandated homeless management information system (HMIS) which currently collects data from all of CT's shelter and transitional housing programs, can be expanded to collect the data elements required by HUD for use of these funds and measure the resulting effect on the homeless service system for years to come. With the support of our state government partners, CCEH has seated an interagency steering committee of both government and private sector stakeholders to advise the further development of a prevention and rapid re-housing strategy for our state.

Ultimately, it is our hope that this pilot can inform future policy regarding how CT intervenes in housing and financial emergencies for both families and individuals. Many jurisdictions around the nation have realized a significant decrease in homelessness when one time and short term housing assistance is provided alongside permanent supportive housing interventions. It is our hope that CT will be among them in the years to come.

I hope you will pass SB 820 and I look forward to our ongoing partnership to end homelessness for the children, and the grownups, in our communities.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

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