

Public Hearing  
Housing Committee  
February 19, 2009

Testimony of Cathy Cementina, Housing Director for the Windham Regional  
Community Council

**H.B. No. 5071: HB5071: AN ACT CONCERNING THE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING  
INITIATIVE**

Senator Gomes, Representative Green and distinguished members of the Committee, My name is Cathy Cementina. I am the Director of Housing Services for a private non-profit agency located on Main Street in Willimantic -- Windham Regional Community Council. Today, I would like to testify in support of HB number 5071: An Act Concerning the Supportive Housing Initiative. In addition, I would like to urge you all to reinstate vital funding for the Next Steps 3 supportive housing projects when the legislature sends its budget recommendations to the Governor.

As many of you know Governor Rell's current budget recommendations eliminate capital financing for Next Steps Round III supportive housing. Without sources of capital financing, there will be no new affordable and supportive housing units built around the state for several years—a delay that our state simply cannot afford to allow. Based on the 2008 statewide Point in Time Count over 4,300 people were homeless on the night of January 30<sup>th</sup> 2008. That number does not include the many more hidden homeless who are doubled up with friends and relatives.

We also know that right now, there are 14 Next Steps 3 supportive housing projects in the state that are ready to go – “shovel ready” – held up by the lack of capital financing. One of those projects is in my community, Willimantic. This project would provide up to 75 units of affordable and supportive housing to homeless and low-income people in the region. But with the hold-up of the Next Steps 3 funding, it has not and cannot move forward.

In my position as Director of Housing Services, I manage three scattered site supportive housing programs whereby we place formerly homeless people in individual apartments with private landlords, subsidizing their rent and providing them with supportive services. Scattered site programs have their advantages, including the ability to seamlessly integrate formerly homeless people into the community.

But Willimantic is a former mill town whose housing stock – like many of the former mill towns throughout the state – has deteriorated through the years. Finding decent, safe housing units is difficult, especially with a 5% vacancy rate at any given time – and yet

people must live in this “mini urban core” because Willimantic is where the services are in western Windham County.

When the HUD Hartford Field Office came out and inspected our clients’ apartments, the comment was made that the units were “marginally” acceptable. We can do better. I urge you to invest in housing development for the working poor, for the disabled, for the homeless. And the rewards will go beyond the value for the residents – we will progressively improve the aesthetics and infrastructure of our communities with new quality housing. Please support HB 5071, and do all that you can to ensure that funding for the Next Steps 3 supportive housing projects is included in the budget given to the Governor by the legislature.