

CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT

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**Testimony of Micheala L. Mitchell, J.D. Staff Attorney
Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc.
Before the Committee on Housing**

Good afternoon distinguished members of the Housing Committee. My name is Micheala Mitchell and I am a Staff Attorney at Connecticut Legal Rights Project. I am here today to speak in support of **H.B. 5071, An Act Concerning The Supportive Housing Initiative.**

Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc. is a non-profit legal services agency that provides individual and systemic legal services to indigent adults who have, or are perceived as having, psychiatric disabilities and who receive, or are eligible to receive, services from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

Connecticut Legal Rights Project maintains offices at all DMHAS operated in-patient and out-patient facilities in the state. Our offices are staffed by attorneys and paralegal advocates. I provide legal services to individual clients to preserve their housing. My testimony today reflects one of the many success stories about the benefit of supportive housing.

A twenty four (24) year old pregnant woman with untreated mental illness was living under the mix master in Waterbury. The homeless outreach team in that area

visited her beneath the highway and offered her an application for the Society of Support (SOS) program through Saint Vincent Depaul. The woman turned it down.

The following April, when winter had barely given way to spring and it was still quite cold outside, the woman had moved into the makeshift "tent city" area adjacent to the railroad tracks. By this time, she had lived outside for two (2) years, lacked shoes and socks, and all she had to wear was a soiled pair of scrubs. The staff from SOS found her there and offered her another opportunity to apply for housing which she again refused. However, a short time after that second visit, the woman relented and contacted the program to say she was ready to try to come inside.

To date, the woman has lived at SOS for three (3) years. The program is now helping her to obtain her drivers' license, and she is employed, managing her illness with psychiatric medication, and will soon graduate college.

Recently, Governor Rell opted to cut 3.2 million dollars of funding for one hundred-fifty (150) units of supportive housing after developers had already spent thousands of dollars getting the property ready. In these times of ever-increasing economic challenges, the poor, the frail and the underrepresented populations of our communities are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the financial crisis.

Connecticut Legal Rights Project, Inc. supports H.B. 5071 in as much as it provides additional funds to expand supportive housing. Supportive housing programs have been shown to reduce Medicaid costs for emergency room and hospital visits, increase tenants' participation and education in employment activities, and contribute to the increase in property values where they are situated. Accordingly,

supportive housing is not only vital to our clients, it is beneficial to all of the citizens of Connecticut.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee might have or provide you with any additional information.