

Housing Public Hearing 2.19.09

HB 5071 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING INITIATIVE.

SB 868 AN ACT CONCERNING PAYMENTS IN LIEU OF TAXES FOR PUBLIC HOUSING AND THE LOW AND MODERATE INCOME TAX ABATEMENT PROGRAM.

Senator Gomes, Representative Green and Members of the committee:

My name is Toni Dolan and I live in Glastonbury. I am the Executive Director of the Beth-El Center, a 34 bed transitional homeless shelter and soup kitchen, located in Milford, CT. I am here today to speak to an issue that all of us in transitional housing shelters face which is the lack of affordable and supportive housing. We are very concerned at the lack of funding for both affordable and supportive housing in the Governor's budget recommendations.

As part of Beth-El's 90-day program, our case managers work with our residents on service plan goals that include jobs, support services, and housing. We work with all of our local social service agencies to secure whatever support services that a client may need, both while they are at the shelter and when they are back in the community. Although we are able to secure employment for some of our residents, others rely on SSI benefits due to significant and long-term disabilities. Based upon their income, and given that there is very little affordable housing, finding a home for our clients is one of the biggest challenges that we face when trying to integrate a resident back into the community. In the Milford area, current listings show that rent for two bedroom apartments range anywhere from \$1,500 to \$2,400 a month. These rental prices are simply prohibitive to most, if not all, of our population. The vacancy rate in rental housing runs 5% statewide, a very tight rental market, making it even more difficult for people who are homeless to obtain housing.

The crisis of homelessness will end only when people have homes. In addition to providing emergency services, other long-term solutions must be given priority. Supportive housing is a cost-effective solution that ends a cycle that often includes homelessness, frequent emergency room visits, hospitalizations and incarceration. According to a report entitled, "*Reaching the Goal of 150,000 New Units: How Close Are We*", November, 2008, as the stock of supportive housing has increased, chronic homelessness across the country has decreased by 30% in the last two years from over

175,000 in 2005 to under 125,000 in 2007. These numbers provide evidence that supportive housing has had a positive impact on long-term homelessness for many and also served as a prevention function for other vulnerable homeless who might not meet the federal chronic homeless definition. This reported decline in homelessness showed progress, but the current economic crisis will surely mean a rise in the future, possibly reversing this progress. The need for supportive and affordable housing is critical to ensure that our state's most vulnerable citizens are not put in further danger as we all face a mounting economic crisis. We urge the legislature to restore funding for those programs that will produce much needed housing: Supportive housing- Next Steps 3, PILOTS, and the Housing Trust Fund.

Thank you.

Toni Dolan, Executive Director

Beth El Center, Milford, CT