



Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

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Testimony of Carol Walter
Executive Director
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 11, 2010-02-10

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the committee. My name is Elijah Bulter and I am here to testify on behalf of Carol Walter, the Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness who is out of state this evening. Carol asked me to testify for her this evening because as a person who has experienced homelessness, I know better than anyone that this great injustice can and should be solved.

Governor Rell's budget proposal continues reductions to existing housing and homelessness programs. We ask you to **restore cuts in state funding for homelessness and housing services**. *Governor Rell recommended a decrease of \$2.4 million (M) over the amount appropriated for 2010-2011 by the General Assembly.* The \$2.4M amounts to about 5% of the housing/homeless line item in the budget of the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS). The DSS homeless/housing line item provides critical funding for 44 emergency homeless shelters, eviction and foreclosure prevention, rental assistance, security deposit guarantees and programs which are vital to tens of thousands of Connecticut residents.

The DSS homeless/housing line item provides critical funding for:

- emergency homeless shelters (44 across Connecticut, some serving families, others serving single adults)
- transitional living programs (31 sites, both family and single adult)
- shelters for victims of domestic violence
- residences for persons with AIDS (serving almost 2,000 people)
- eviction and foreclosure prevention
- rental assistance (serving about 2600 families, including those with disabilities)
- security deposit guarantees

... and other homelessness prevention programs which are vital to tens of thousands of Connecticut residents.

For people such as myself, a homeless shelter is the last "house on the block" when all other resources have failed. Financial support for these vital emergency programs is cobbled from a pittance of state dollars, community foundation dollars

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and private donations. They've been forced to do more with less. Last year, 15,600 different people were served in our state's shelters and transitional housing programs. With just over \$7 million total in state funds supporting approximately 75 sites, we estimate a state contribution of just \$450 per homeless person per year.

We ask that you also expand the number of rental assistance certificates by 100. The rental assistance program (RAP) prevents homelessness by serving families who cannot afford housing in Connecticut's high rent market. This program is vital to disabled residents who cannot find adequate, affordable housing. Approximately 2,500 Connecticut households are served and more than 2,350 families are currently on the waiting list for RAPs .On average, people wait at least three years for a certificate to become available. It has been more than five years since the RAP waiting list was open and when it opened, approximately 43,000 people applied.

We ask you to support the Reaching Home Campaign and CT Coalition to End Homelessness' call for new funding for the creation of supportive housing for frequent users of expensive state services. Supportive housing is a proven, cost effective solution to long term homelessness that matches supportive services with affordable housing.

Last, the CT Coalition to End Homelessness supports an increase in state revenues to support homeless/housing services and other vital safety net programs. As part of a balanced approach to meeting the needs of state residents, we must evaluate and reduce tax expenditures, close corporate tax loopholes, cancel a reduction in the estate tax that would benefit very wealthy persons, evaluate the state's "hidden budget" of tax breaks, and raise income taxes for high-income earners.

It is necessary to restructure state revenues for economic vitality and sustainability of critical economic security programs. There are many ways to begin this and no one approach need be the sole solution. We cannot balance the budget on the backs of those least able to afford cuts to safety net services.

Thank you for providing funding for the programs which work to not only serve homeless families, but to prevent homelessness during tough economic times.

Elijah Butler