



Public Health Committee

March 12, 2010

Testimony on S.B. No. 405, “An Act Concerning the Development of Cost Effective Supportive Housing for Frequent Users of Costly State Services”

Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and Members of the Public Health Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today in support of S.B. No. 405. My name is Francesca Martin, and I am Associate Director of the Corporation for Supportive Housing, Connecticut Program. CSH is a national nonprofit that partners with communities to create affordable housing linked with services as a cost-effective solution to long-term homelessness. During the past several years CSH has worked with government and private sector partners around the country to test approaches aimed at making better use of public sector resources by focusing on the ***avoidable use of institutional and crisis systems.***

The need for this strategic focus in Connecticut is clear. Emergency shelters around the state are full. All 3 housing subsidy programs administered by State agencies have waiting lists of more than a year. People are “waiting for housing” in hospital inpatient units, jails, emergency rooms, and nursing homes—and there are some who cycle repeatedly through these avoidable systems at a growing cost to an already-stretched state budget. To address the urgent fiscal situation, the Legislature is considering further cuts to housing resources and community-based service providers.

S.B. 405 provides the Legislature and state government with a different option—one that ends this ‘institutional circuit’ by targeting supportive housing to individuals and families with complex health conditions and who:

- are homeless and have become dependent on emergency healthcare resources;

- o individuals exiting institutional settings or who have become “high utilizers” of public systems

The largest drivers of public sector costs are health care and criminal justice systems. There is a growing body of evidence that has confirmed with data what we have also seen here anecdotally:

- o many communities experience a relatively small number of individuals who repeatedly use hospital ER’s or who cycle through local jails, shelters and healthcare systems;
- o New York City placed 100 individuals into permanent supportive housing to break the institutional circuit between jail, shelter, and emergency health systems—evaluation results showed 53% reduction in jail days and virtually eliminating returns to homelessness

Connecticut has a supportive housing infrastructure in place that is ready and able to respond, with:

- o 4,400 units of supportive housing in more than 80 communities;
- o a statewide network of service providers linking tenants with health and employment supports
- o a 15-year track record of interagency cooperation that has both managed multiple financing resources (including the State’s investment) and successfully leveraged millions of dollars from non-state sources—including federal, private philanthropic and private equity investors

Through the leadership of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, there are 2 pilot projects underway that are models to build upon: the first is an Interagency collaboration called “FUSE” (Frequent User Service Enhancement), which provides supportive housing to 30 individuals identified as “frequent users” of shelters and jails, based on criteria of extensive shelter days and multiple jail stays. The second pilot (“Housing First”) provides permanent supportive housing to up to 20 persons directly discharging from hospitals or from extended periods of homelessness. As of yesterday, 10 individuals have been identified for housing, and 5 of them are direct

discharges from hospitals. Both of these efforts include an evaluation to document and quantify impact on service systems, costs, and quality of life.

Supportive housing can help control the costs that government is most concerned about. Why continue to spend \$1,000 per day per person for a hospital inpatient bed, when we could invest approximately \$50/day for supportive housing. The Legislature has an unprecedented opportunity—right now, through this bill—to make a different decision about how resources are allocated—and to interrupt this “institutional circuit” by identifying and investing resources in a smarter way. We can chart a new course in Connecticut, and provide permanent, cost-effective supports to our most vulnerable citizens while also reducing the pressure on over-burdened public systems. I encourage you to support this legislation. Thank you for your time and your attention.

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