



**The Association of Religious Communities**  
**325 Main St, Danbury, CT 06810 (203)-792-9450**

Good afternoon. I am Nikki Singer, and I am the Case Manager and Housing Advocate for the Association of Religious Communities, also known as ARC, in Danbury. I work with families and single adults who are homeless or at a risk of losing their housing. I am here today to tell you about the people I work with.

Since July 1, 2009, **514** people in Danbury have sought services because they are homeless; of these are **45** families with **90** children. We have seen a **33% increase** in the number of families experiencing homelessness this year compared to last year, and the number of children who are homeless has **doubled**.

At ARC, we work with approximately **20%** of the total homeless population in Danbury, and we have seen a similar trend of increasing family homelessness. We work with families who are at risk of becoming homeless to maintain their housing, as well as working with folks to get back into permanent housing.

For families who lose their housing for whatever reason, they face a multitude of obstacles to getting re-housed: low or no income, high rents, trying to save for a security deposit... Not to mention the most pressing question: if my children and I become homeless today, where will we stay tonight?

For families, there is a severe lack of emergency shelters: We have one emergency shelter for families, which allows a 60 day stay; one short term family shelter, which allows a 90 day stay; and one long term housing program where families can stay for 2 years. Most of these are full, and the 90 day and 2 year programs both have waitlists. Not very reassuring for a mother who is being evicted today with nowhere to go!

When the question moves towards re-housing, the biggest challenge – especially for a single mom – is finding an adequate and affordable rental. We have some of the highest rents in the state; on a good day I can find a room to rent for \$550/month; not an apartment, a room -- Certainly not adequate for a mother with 2 or 3 children.

Once we find the apartment, then comes finding a security deposit. Most landlords want a **2-month deposit**. If you have a 2 bedroom, which ranges \$1000-\$1500, your security deposit could be **\$3000!** Plus the first month's rent. Could you save **\$4000** on minimum wage, state cash assistance, or a disability check?

The General Assembly has some tough decisions to make about our state's budget; there is no doubt about that. But cutting any amount of funding to the DSS homeless/housing line item will take away resources from some of the state's most vulnerable people, the homeless.

The emergency shelters available in our state are not able to keep up with the increasing demand, cutting any funding for shelters means more people who will have to sleep outside, in abandoned buildings, or in their cars.

There is a shortage across the state of space in transitional housing programs for families; we cannot cut what funding is available to existing programs. Cutting these programs will increase the number of **families** sleeping in substandard or uninhabitable space.

The Security Deposit Guarantee Program offered by DSS takes away the roadblock of a 2 month security deposit for people who are homeless, and is much less costly than paying cash up front for a security deposit -- or to pay to keep people in shelters.

Even as the economy is starting to pick up again, people who have lost their jobs and housing will continue to struggle. There is an increasing need for all of the programs available through DSS, and these programs can make the difference in whether a family is able to recover from the recession.

As you look at the cost effectiveness of programs and what the long term effects of cuts will be, please remember that it is more cost effective and more humane to keep people in stable, permanent housing than to provide short term shelter. But it is also necessary to ensure emergency shelter to families and single adults, so that they can have a chance to return to stable housing. I urge you to maintain current levels of funding for all DSS housing/homeless services.

Thank you for your time this afternoon.