

Housing Committee Public Hearing

Thursday, March 4, 2010

Testimony Submitted by Elizabeth Bessette,

Southeastern Connecticut Ten Year Plan To End Homelessness

Chairs and members of the housing committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today. My name is Elizabeth Bessette, and I am a graduate student at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. I am presently working in the Southeastern Connecticut Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness which includes the cities of Norwich and New London and the surrounding towns. I am here to speak to you today about H.B. 5374, An Act Concerning Promoting and Sustaining Affordable Housing In Connecticut.

While staffing a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness we work towards the goal of developing affordable and permanent supportive housing units to provide adequate shelter for those in our region who are struggling. The need for affordable housing is felt by many different kinds of people, including families, single individuals, those out of work, disabled individuals and the chronically homeless.

A continuum of affordable housing should be developed in order to address these various needs. Our Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness is committed to providing all cities and towns in Southeastern Connecticut with this continuum of housing; a range of housing units from those for the homeless to those which are considered affordable and workforce housing.

Generally speaking, housing is considered affordable when the household spends no more than 30% of its income on housing costs. In Connecticut, approximately 40% of households spend more than 30% of their income on housing. When households spend more than this 30%, they may not have enough income for other necessities, such as food, medical care, transportation, or emergencies, especially households with limited incomes. The lack of available affordable housing in this state has lead many individuals and families to fall behind on their payments as they prioritize their spending,

I fully support this bill, as it is very critical that plans of conservation and development have language for affordable and workforce housing. The proposed changes would allow for the provision of housing

for the increasing number of homelessness, those who are losing their jobs, who are marginal, or in need of section 8 vouchers. This bill furthers the mission of our Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness; encouraging the creation of housing for the less fortunate in our communities.

I'm very concerned about what affect the governor's budget mitigation plan will have on this proposed bill. In an effort to relieve local mandates, it has been proposed to allow towns to seek waivers to delay their local plans of conservation and development. The mitigation plan would also cut \$150,000 in aid to the state's regional planning organizations, which provide housing expertise to their member towns.

Without POCDs which include preserving and developing affordable housing, the outlook of housing in the communities in Southeastern Connecticut and around the state will change. Individuals and families will no longer be able to afford to live in the towns they grew up in. Individuals in professions such as nursing and police departments will not be able to continue to live in the communities in which they work. A concentration of urban poverty will continue to rise as individuals and families seek lower priced housing which is able to exist in large cities. Changes such as these are devastating for small towns and communities, and bills like H.B. 5374 work towards allowing the creation of housing units which allow individuals to stay in the communities of their choice.

I urge you to continue to support affordable and workforce housing legislation, as housing is the key element to building stronger communities and stronger lives for those living in them.

Thank you.