

Appropriations Committee: Budget Hearing: Human Services  
Written Testimony of Amanda Girardin: 39 Gilead Rd, Andover, CT 06232

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee: My name is Amanda Girardin; I am a student at the UCONN School of Social Work majoring in Community Organizing. I am doing my current field placement with the Middlesex Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness. I am writing you to urge you to please reinstate the Security Deposit Guarantee Program, however I do not support some of the changes proposed in Governor Malloy's budget.

In the time since the Security Deposit Guarantee was closed, providers of homelessness services and those who run the 18 shelters in our state and various transitional housing programs are struggling to move people through the system into stable housing. Increasing numbers of people are being turned away from shelters as those currently there cannot afford to move on to their own housing. The Middlesex Family Shelter has turned away up to 250 people a month because of this problem. This winter especially, with the continuing recession and the severe weather, the shelters are over capacity and many have been spending their nights awake and sitting up in warming shelters.

As an intern I work with consumers who were previously or are currently homeless. They have suffered from addictions, mental illness and sheer misery living winters out in the cold. Many of them and other homeless people actually hold jobs, but with growing rents that can cost sometimes 75% of their gross income, they cannot afford security deposits on top of that. Once people are housed they are more likely and able to seek services, obtain health care, maintain or apply for jobs and better care for themselves and their families putting money back into the economy.

I believe that some of the suggested changes to the Security Deposit Guarantee program, while meant to save the state money will actually incur cost to the state as homeless people, or those at risk of homelessness, are unable to find stable housing and continue to use other costly public services. Requiring that proof of homelessness be filed with the court in order to receive funding from the program will be detrimental to the population. What proof of homelessness is there for victims of domestic violence, LGBT youth who are kicked out, divorced mothers, or youth who are abused by their caretakers? I also urge you to reject the change that would require copays from clients. Most clients cannot afford these copays, and would most likely appeal to have it waived, leading to additional administrative fees for every transaction. Clients already "buy-in" to the program because they are extremely grateful and would not have their own place without the help from the security deposit guarantee program.

Connecticut's current homelessness crisis system is geared towards managing this problem rather than preventing and eventually ending homelessness in Connecticut. The Security Deposit Guarantee Program, along with other solutions like affordable and supportive housing and rental subsidies, will allow Connecticut to prevent and homelessness and decrease the utilization of costly public services that this population would otherwise utilize.

I ask you to please consider opening this program once again without any changes that would detract from the amount of dollars available for the population to utilize as security deposits.