



KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION

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**Testimony before the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee
March 7, 2011
In Favor of SB 1008**

Good morning/afternoon Senator Daily, Representative Widlitz, and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Cheri Bragg from Keep the Promise, a Coalition dedicated to ensuring that a comprehensive, community mental health system is created and sustained in Connecticut.

The Coalition strongly supports SB 1008, An Act Authorizing Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements and Other Purposes. A lack of housing remains a top factor in people with mental illness ending up in nursing facilities or prison, as well as preventing discharge from hospitals and other inpatient settings in Connecticut. This bill would appropriate dollars for supportive housing bonding.

Supportive housing is a cost-effective, proven solution to ending homelessness for individuals and families. It is safe (security is part of this housing model), affordable (rap vouchers help ensure people do not pay more than 30% of their income toward housing) and offers services (eg. Clinical, budgeting, transportation, etc.), either on-site or nearby, which are key to helping meet people's needs in the community. A stable living situation, which includes housing, medical and practical needs, are the key to avoiding costly crisis alternatives such as emergency rooms, hospitalizations, homelessness and the criminal justice system.

Governor Malloy included \$30 million in the 2012 capital budget to create 150 new units of permanent supportive housing, along with dollars for the associated support services and rental assistance. The Coalition supports the administration's willingness to invest in this cost-effective, future-focused vision that will help some of our state's most vulnerable people, stimulate the economy, and reduce the state deficit.

Studies have shown that supportive housing can:

- Reduce hospitalizations and Medicaid-funded services by between 27% and 77%
- Reduce incarceration by more than 50%
- Prevent children in homeless families from entering into foster care, avoiding foster care costs of over \$8,000 per year per family
- Stimulate the economy by creating construction, property management and social service jobs

In a recent KTP video, a Coalition member from Bridgeport spoke about the impact supportive housing had on her life. Despite enduring a childhood fraught with abuse, she earned several academic degrees including a Master's degree, worked in professional settings, and started a family. Unfortunately, she had to quit work to

stay home to care for her husband when he became very ill with cancer. When he died she became extremely depressed and spent the next several years in bed, eventually losing everything including her children and her home. She lived in her car and later obtained mental health services which eventually led to obtaining a supportive housing apartment. She has reunited with her children, is proud to be working and paying taxes, and looks forward to the next steps in her career and life.

This is just one person's success story. There are many others, but we continue to hear from Coalition members including Veterans who are still homeless or who live in unsafe, unaffordable housing, as well as in unacceptable living conditions including bed bug infestations. Our society finds it very easy to judge people who are homeless as "just not trying hard enough". I can tell you from speaking to Coalition members as well as from visiting a family shelter recently that no one starts out this life planning on being homeless, especially not children. But through illness, disability, job loss, and other circumstances beyond their control, individuals and families do end up homeless, especially in an economic downturn. It is extremely difficult to learn about and manage a mental illness or successfully navigate other hurdles without a stable, safe, affordable place to live. It is in Connecticut's best interest, both financially as well as from a human stand point, to invest in supportive housing. It is an investment in housing, yes, but also an investment in prevention (preventing people from accessing costly alternatives) and an investment in the individuals and families in our communities. Supporting people through supportive housing makes sense.

On behalf of the Keep the Promise Coalition, I thank you for your time today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Cheri Bragg
Keep the Promise Coalition Coordinator