# State of Connecticut

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**
STATE CAPITOL

**REPRESENTATIVE WHIT BETTS**
SEVENTY-EIGHTH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 4200
HARTFORD, CT 06106-1591

TOLL FREE: (800) 842-1423
CAPITOL: (860) 240-8700
Whit.Betts@housegop.ct.gov

**MEMBER**
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON AGING
SELECT COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE

Good morning Senator Cassano and Rep. Gentile, and members of the Planning and Development Committee.

My name is Whit Betts and I am the state representative who represents the people from Plymouth, Terryville, and part of Bristol

Nearly 100 homeowners from Bristol have asked me, Rep. Nicastro, and Sen. Welch to propose legislation asking that a public hearing be part of the decision making process for the location of group homes.

Last summer and early fall there were two separate occasions in which many of these homeowners heard – by rumor and by accident – that a group home for troubled teenagers were moving into their neighborhood. Predictably many of these owners had many questions, and the families with very young children were extremely concerned a for the safety of their children.

As they sought information they were told the following :

1. They had no input on the decision to approve a group home moving into their neighborhood.

2. The group would move into their neighborhood once approval from the Department of Children and Family Services was given to the non-profit organization – Klingberg.

3. The homeowners had no recourse and could not prevent this event from taking place if the Dept. Of Children Youth Services gave its approval.



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4. Local elected officials were contacted and said they knew nothing about a group home moving into the neighborhood. Homeowners were told that local officials had no input or say in the decision making process for the location of a group home.

5. Homeowners were told that the value of their homes would not go down if a group home for troubled teenagers moved into their neighborhood.

Many people asked for information about the criteria used to determine the location for a group home but they did not receive any.

In sum, the homeowners were predictably very upset and worried. They repeatedly asked the questions – who was looking out for the safety of their families and neighborhoods ? where are the rights of homeowners ? who is looking out for them and their families ?

So many questions .... So many worries ... all met with the response of

"there is nothing you can do to stop a group home from moving into the neighborhood".

If you put yourself in the position of these homeowners I believe many of you would have the same questions and fears.

What was clearly lacking was communication.

In response to the growing outcry Klingberg withdrew their two applications to buy houses to set up the group home.

What unified and motivated the homeowners to get organized is the very strong belief that they had no rights, and that nobody was representing their interests or concerns.

As difficult as it is to balance the needs of troubled teenagers – or other individuals who reside in a group home - with the concerns of homeowners we must make an effort to do so. At a minimum a process needs to be established for homeowners so that their interest and concerns can be heard and addressed.

The desired outcome is to meet the needs of the residents who live in group homes and the neighborhoods in which they will be living. I believe the new Commissioner for the Department of Children and Youth Services shares this desire, and if I can assist in the efforts to meet this objective I'd be happy to do so.

Thank you.