



February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Testimony of Paul Kosowsky of Youth Continuum  
Related to  
**H.B. No. 5142 - AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE LOCATION  
OF GROUP HOMES**  
And  
**H.B. No. 5259 - AN ACT REQUIRING PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE LOCATION  
OF GROUP HOMES.**

Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile, and distinguished members of the Planning and Development Committee, thank you for your time and attention to the issues before you today. My name is Paul Kosowsky and I serve as Vice President of Youth Continuum, a non-profit organization that has been providing group home services for youth in state care since 1968. Currently Youth Continuum provides four Therapeutic Group Homes and two PASS Group Homes for adolescent boys in six separate facilities, two in New Haven, two in Bridgeport, one in North Haven and one in East Haven.

As one of the senior members of the Intensive Treatment and Transitional Services Division for CT Nonprofits, I represent a wide variety of private providers across the state that care for children in state custody in group home settings. I represent the views of my own organization, Youth Continuum, and those of my professional colleagues in stating that we are universally opposed to H.B. 5142 and H.B. 5259.

Some of the most damaged and vulnerable children in our state must be removed from their homes and communities to be treated until such time as they ready to return to community living. Group Homes provide a vital link for many of these children, providing them with the opportunity to return to family, school and community in a planned and clinically appropriate manner, preparing them for long-term successful participation as young adults in society.

These bills raise potentially serious impediments to group home development, creating obstacles to returning youth to their homes and communities in the most expedient manner possible. I am opposed to the above bills on very practical grounds, as outlined below.

1. Every community already has existing zoning regulations and procedures which identify where group homes may be sited, and how the public may support or oppose such projects. Small group homes of six or fewer residents are considered single-family residences, while larger group homes must obtain a rooming house license. Each town has the right and obligation to gather information about the proposed program during the zoning application process, and I assure you, does so actively, in order to protect the best interests of its citizens. There are notifications to neighbors and hearings, open to the public, where concerns can be raised and addressed. There have been numerous instances where proposed homes have been rejected by the community. With this said, any additional legislation seems unnecessary and duplicative.



Legislative Branch  
Office of the Secretary of the Senate  
Office of the Secretary of the House

746 Chapel St.,  
4th Floor  
New Haven, CT  
06510

p: 203-562-3396  
f: 203-667-6888

2. Making the issue of program location more complex would be counter-productive. When the market is more robust than it is today, non-profits must look long and hard to find an appropriate group home site. DCF licensing requirements dictate the size of bedrooms per youth. The site must have room for staff offices, space for group activities, a small yard or access to nearby playgrounds. There must be adequate dining and kitchen space and the site must be near public transportation so families can visit easily. The program cannot be sited within 1,000 feet of a pre-existing group home. Obviously such a relatively large home and other site requirements limit the housing that would suit the program's need.

As a result, non-profits must often look at many communities at the same time when seeking to start a new program. During our own most recent project several years ago, we looked for property in Ansonia, Derby, Shelton, Seymour, Stratford, Milford, Orange and Naugatuck before finally identifying a viable site in Bridgeport. Even with all this, it took over 6 months to identify an appropriate location. Having to go to each community to seek public approval in advance would be tedious at best. Most group home providers do not have the financial wherewithal to utilize management or program staff to spend the amount of time such limits would impose to search for properties under these conditions.

Second, this leaves the question of the purchase of the site. In a robust economy, housing disappears from the market very quickly. Once an appropriate site is identified, any delays beyond existing zoning procedures prior to purchase would prevent almost any agency from moving forward. Losing the ability to close on a property quickly would render the process impossible.

The option for non-profits to take the risk and purchase property in hopes that the town would approve the use later could be calamitous. The vast majority of non-profits do not have the resources to take such risks and could be devastated by subsequent failure to win community approval for the site. Being saddled with such debt would put most non-profits out of business.

In closing I ask that you please reject these bills as unnecessary. Current zoning and DCF licensing requirements are more than adequate to insure the proper siting of group homes, as has been proven over and over again. I invite you to feel free to contact me if I can be of help in answering any questions, or in bringing together a group of providers with whom you could have a dialogue. Thank you.