

CONNECTICUT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT

BOX 351, SILVER STREET, MIDDLETOWN, CT 06457
TELEPHONE (860) 262-5030 • FAX (860) 262-5035

Governor's Proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments

Testimony of Helen Mehm in support of CT Legal Rights Project's HOME Project:

I am a paralegal with CLRP and I work under the direct supervision of an attorney. I spend the majority of my time in the community doing outreach. I meet with clients at social clubs, DMHAS agencies, their homes or wherever it is in the community that they feel comfortable to meet.

Despite the protections of the Fair Housing Act and the ADA, people with psychiatric disabilities face many challenges in obtaining and maintaining their housing. I've seen how stable housing facilitates a stable life in the community.

I would like to share with you a few of the stories of people I've worked with who had their homes and stability jeopardized:

My clients dream of living in subsidized housing. On their limited incomes it's usually the only way they can have access to safe, decent and affordable housing. One of my client's dreams was to live in specific subsidized housing building because he knew it was quiet. He needed a quiet home to maintain his mental health stability. Due to a disability related mistake he thought he could never get into subsidized housing, especially not the one he wanted. The apartments he could afford were in high traffic, noisy neighborhoods. He bounced around from one apartment to another, never getting settled and never able to focus on his recovery. With CLRP's assistance he was able to move to the apartment of his dreams. He said his life has never been so peaceful. Every evening he says a prayer of thanks for the new found stability in his life.

Another client was extremely upset because he was being evicted. He didn't do anything wrong. His landlord wanted to sell the house and wanted everyone out—the sooner the better. This was my client's first home since homelessness and the thought of losing this home was devastating. When I checked out my client's apartment, I couldn't believe what I saw. Lights didn't work, no water came out of some faucets, the stove didn't work, and the backyard was littered with old appliances, toilets, and sinks. But this was my client's home and he didn't want to leave it. He thought he would be homeless again. He thought his situation was hopeless. With CLRP's assistance my client moved to subsidized housing. He told me he couldn't believe that such a nice place could be his home. He is now able to focus on his continued recovery.

My final story concerns a woman who was living in a housing authority apartment. She studied art in college and her work was hanging in her apartment. She was going through a difficult time. Sometimes even people who have had a period of stability need adjustments in their treatment. She was going through this adjustment when she received an eviction notice. This destroyed her mental health stability and put her in crisis requiring hospital level of care. She did lose her apartment, but CLRP was able to broker a deal with the housing authority. When my client was ready, she was discharged to supportive housing. When I visit other clients at this site, I see her. She is happy to have a new home with the supports necessary to help her maintain her housing.

People are at risk for losing their housing simply because they are people with disabilities. After listening to my stories I'm sure you agree that access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is essential in maintaining stable lives for people with disabilities.