



supportive housing
WORKS

CLRP: A lifeline for our mentally ill

Honorable Representatives and Senators:

My name is David Rich and I am the Executive Director of Supportive Housing Works, a collaborative effort to eliminate homelessness along the I-95 Corridor in CT. I live in both Lakeville and New Haven, CT. I am here today to testify in support of the CT Legal Rights Project (CLRP) and their request for \$350,000 for housing advocacy for the mentally ill.

According to "Reaching Home: A Ten Year Plan to End Long-Term Homelessness in Connecticut," 33,000 experience homelessness at some point during the year. Worse still, homelessness in Connecticut is increasing. Emergency shelters are full; the length of stay in shelters has increased; and turnaways have increased by over 200% from 2001 to 2011. At any given time, approximately half of Connecticut's homeless people are experiencing long-term or chronic homelessness - that is, without acceptable permanent housing for more than 90 days. A significant percentage of today's homeless population suffers from chronic mental illnesses, so there is an increased demand for existing services as well as a need for new programs and services that address the complex needs of today's homeless population. As the "Reaching Home" reports states, "the enormous public cost of this emergency care is exceeded only by the misery of people needlessly trapped in years of homelessness."

On my day job I spend most of time developing housing for the homelessness and am extremely heartened by your and the Governors' vision and commitment to provide substantial recourses for the housing the homeless. We have, however, realized through our work that just building housing for those most in need, including the mentally ill, is not enough; we need strong and courageous advocacy within CT to champion the needs and rights of those who are most vulnerable. We have such a champion in CLRP.

For the last decade Connecticut has greatly benefited from a substantial private grantor funding CLRP to provide housing advocacy services to the mentally ill throughout the state. This private foundation now believes it is time for the State of CT to step up and provide this much needed housing advocacy for our state's most vulnerable and mentally ill residents. At a cost of a little over \$1000 per client CLRP has provided housing advocacy services to over 300 individuals annually for the past decade. This is an extremely cost effective means to ensure safe and supportive housing for those most in need. And far less costly than the alternative, hundreds of emergency room visits hospital stays and expensive inpatient treatment. And you have already heard from and will hear from other clients well served by CLRP's services.

As a board member I can attest to how hard CLRP's executive team and staff have worked to tighten their belts through absorbed layoffs, a salary freeze, furlough days, and a pension reduction to protect client services. However, without state funds, most of CLRP's housing advocacy services to the mental ill will end by May, 2012. CLRP simply does not have other options available to them to continue to provide these invaluable housing services.

Thank you for your time this evening and for your continued commitment, as a vital partner of CLRP, to advocate for our most vulnerable residents so that they too may have what most of us take for granted- a safe decent and independent place to call home.

David B Rich, February 22nd, 2012