



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION SERVICES
A Healthcare Service Agency

Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Patricia A. Rehmer, MSN
Commissioner

Memorandum:

TO: Housing Committee

FROM: Commissioner Patricia Rehmer, DMHAS

DATE: February 20, 2013

SUBJECT: Written Testimony on Senate Bills SB 336 and SB 337

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Butler, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee: thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on SB 336 and SB 337.

Elderly/disabled housing has been an important piece of the recovery equation for some of our clients, especially when there are so many struggling to find a place to live, and the supply of reasonably priced housing throughout the state is so limited. Given that the persons we serve are more likely than most people to be isolated from their communities, are more frequently themselves the victims of crime, and are more likely to be receiving public assistance, access to elderly/disabled housing has been an important, if not crucial, part of the recovery process for some individuals.

We understand that local housing authorities are struggling as more individuals with disabilities are living in the community and more elderly are looking at other options for housing such as assisted living or bringing services into their home. We understand that these trends have the potential to change the balance of individuals living in senior disabled housing and that this also creates a fiscal issue for housing authorities, but we do not believe that it is appropriate nor constitutional to establish caps for persons with disabilities. The state has added over 500 units of supportive housing in the past few years for people with behavioral health needs, with money allocated from the legislature and the federal government. I will tell you that we have more sites planned and additional dollars committed to this, but it takes two or three years to find an appropriate site, remodel or rebuild and, in some instances, convince the city or town to allow us to place people with behavioral health needs in the community we have selected.

The top three reasons cited for people with psychiatric disabilities not being able to leave the hospital all relate to the serious shortage of affordable housing here in Connecticut. Placing a cap, or limiting in any other way, access to elderly/disabled housing will only serve to exacerbate the gridlock situation we already face. The resulting inability to move people who are well enough out into the community means that those who are seriously ill are unable to enter treatment, due to the lack of available bed space.

I am cognizant of the fact that these are difficult issues, and ones which have placed public pressure on the legislative process. Thus, I would welcome the opportunity to work with you to address some of your concerns regarding senior disabled housing. I ask only that you remember that the people we serve also need, and have the right to have, safe, affordable and accessible housing in order to achieve recovery and become productive members of our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on these bills.