Connecticut
Fair Housing Center

TESTIMONY OF THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING CENTER IN OPPOSITION TO BILL # 336 AND 337 ESTABLISHING GOALS FOR MIXED POPULATION PUBLIC HOUSING

My name is Erin Kemple. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. I submit this testimony in opposition to Bill 336 and 337 which establish goals for mixed population public housing. The proposed bills will reduce the supply of affordable housing for people with disabilities and violates the Connecticut fair housing laws.

The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a statewide non-profit organization dedicated to ensuring that everyone in the state has access to housing of their choice free from discrimination. We carry out our work through civil rights litigation and advocacy on behalf of victims of housing discrimination, research and policy development in the areas of racial segregation and access to opportunity, and advocacy on behalf of homeowners facing foreclosure.

The Center opposes these bills for four reasons. First, the state currently reserves 80% of elderly/disabled public housing complexes (also known as mixed population housing) for people over the age of 55. The proposed bill would reduce the percentage of these units available to people with disabilities to 14%. People with disabilities already face almost insurmountable obstacles when looking for affordable housing in Connecticut. Approximately 10% of people with disabilities between the ages of 18 and 64 live below the poverty level compared with only 6% of people over 65.[1] With an SSI (disability) check of $668

[1] See, American Fact Finder, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_11_1YR_DP03&prodType=table

221 Main Street, 4th Floor • Hartford, CT • 06106
860-247-4400 (Hartford) • 888-247-4401 (Toll Free)
860-247-4236 (fax)
www.ctfairhousing.org

per month, people with disabilities in Connecticut can only afford rent of $209 per month.[2] There is no private housing available for $209 per month and even most affordable housing has rent charges in excess of $209 per month. In addition, more than 46% of complaints received by the Center each year are from people with disabilities. Too often these complaints relate to people with disabilities being denied private housing. If the supply of affordable public housing is further reduced, I suspect that the number of complaints we receive will also go up.

Second, reducing the supply of affordable housing available to people with disabilities could cost Connecticut money by increasing state-funded nursing home costs. Connecticut currently participates in a HUD-funded program called "Money Follows the Person." This program is designed to move people from state-funded nursing homes back into the community. Many of the participants in the program are younger than 60 and all need affordable housing. Many also need housing that is accessible to wheelchair users. A recent review of properties advertised on the State's CT Housing Search website reveals that only 8% of the advertised and available units had a flat entryway or ramp and the 32" or wider doorways necessary to admit most wheelchairs.[3] Once other features, like accessible bathrooms and kitchens are added to this search, the percentage of available accessible housing goes down as low as 2%. In addition, the number of units that list at least one accessible features on a paratransit route is only 5% for the state as a whole and in some counties as low as 2%. Reducing the number of affordable units available to people leaving nursing homes will result in extending the stays for state nursing home residents and increased cost to the State.

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[2] This assumes that the tenant pays rent equal to 30% of his or her income. See, http://nlihc.org/oor/2012/CT

[3] This review was conducted on December 29, 2012 and reviewed all listings by county based on a maximum rent of $4,500 to ensure that all units were counted. The search engine did not permit a search by flat entryway and 32" doorways for Tolland County, so all units indicating "handicapped features" were counted. CT Housing Search is available at http://www.socialserve.com/tenant/index.html?state_id=4110&ch=CT.

Third, the proposed reduction in the number of housing units available to people with disabilities may have the unintended consequence of increasing the homeless population. According to the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness' Point in Time Count of 2012, 69% of people chronically homeless are disabled.[4] By reducing the number of affordable units available to people with disabilities, people who are homeless and disabled will remain homeless longer.

Fourth, Bill 336 and 337 state that if the elderly population is insufficient to fill the units reserved for persons over age 60, such units may be given to applicants aged 50 to 59 and then to nonelderly persons with disabilities. This provision violates the Connecticut fair housing laws. Pursuant to Conn. Gen. Stat. §46a-64c it is illegal to refuse to rent to a person because of his or her age. While Conn. Gen. Stat. §46a-64c (b)(1) exempts housing for elders from the age discrimination laws, the exemption only applies to people who are over the age of 60. Giving a preference to people ages 50 to 59 violates the law.

We urge the Committee to reject Bill 336 and 337.

[4] See, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, http://www.cceh.org/files/publications/Homelessness_in_Connecticut_at_One_Point_in_Time_Taking_a_snapshot_developing_a_full_picture.pdf