



FACES OF HOMELESSNESS

Written Testimony of Nate Fox, Program Coordinator & Homeless Ally
Before the Judiciary Committee
March 13, 2013

In Support of HB 6572, AAC Intimidation Based on Bigotry of Bias Against a Homeless Person

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Homeless Human Rights Campaign and thank you for supporting the principle that all people, whether housed or unhoused, deserve equal treatment, dignity and respect under the law.

My name is Nate Fox and I'm Project Supervisor for the Faces of Homelessness Speakers' Bureau and co-coordinator of the CT Homeless Human Rights Campaign. As a man of relative privilege, I'm fortunate to say that I've never had to face the pain of experiencing homelessness nor the fear of being attacked out of bigotry and hate, but as a homeless ally I have spent a considerable amount of time over the past 3+ years working in shelters and with the homeless community, helping to found Beat of the Street – a street newspaper – and other social justice projects. During this time I have heard and seen firsthand the mistreatment and risk of violence that people experiencing homelessness face. Recent data shows a national problem – almost 1300 people experiencing homelessness have been attacked and over 300 killed over the past 12 years - and 20% of respondents (61 people) to the 2012 Hartford Homeless Vulnerability Index survey reported having faced physical violence in the past year. But the problem runs deeper than the statistics show.

Just 3 days ago, I was in a shelter doing outreach for this public hearing when I overheard one of the shelter workers telling the other staff that one of the shelter residents had returned to the shelter a day earlier complaining about 3 youth throwing rocks at him. Chuckling, the worker explained how the man had decided to defend himself and started throwing rocks back at the youth. But as soon as he did, more youth joined in pelting the man with rocks. The shelter worker explained, still chuckling, that the man was covered in welts when he returned.

I share this story with you to show how deep this problem runs. When the frontline workers of the shelter, the very people who are supposed to be supporting our homeless brothers and sisters, turn their backs and laugh, we have a problem. When homeless folks don't feel comfortable reporting these crimes and assaults to the police for fear of being ignored, laughed at, or worse, we have a problem. When people are left unprotected and exposed to the elements, subjected to the attacks of those looking for someone to bully, we have a problem. Truly solving this problem will only happen when we finally end homelessness in this state and country, but until then we can take a step towards protecting all residents of Connecticut by eliminating the discrimination, bias, hate, and mistreatment facing our homeless neighbors by making it a hate crime to physically or verbally assault homeless folks.

Thank you.