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Written Testimony of Lisa P. Sementilli, Deputy Director
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 Committees, thank you for hearing my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), and thank you for your consideration of matters of importance to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Connecticut's emergency shelters have run at or over 100% of their legal capacity for more than two years. More than 16,000 persons (and this includes children) used our emergency and transitional housing programs last year. Our data show that far more families and individuals experience housing instability and homelessness at any one time than can be served by our fragile prevention and crisis response system -- *an estimated 40,000 families are "doubled up" (staying with family or friend for economic reasons) in Connecticut.*

CCEH believes all people experiencing homelessness should be treated with dignity and respect. Further, trauma and violence are too common an experience for those without a safe place to call home.

Bias or intimidation against those experiencing housing crises stems from ignorance about the social construct of class and poverty. Unemployment, trauma, violence, substance abuse and mental health challenges occur at all socioeconomic levels. The difference is that those with the least means to overcome those challenges often experience housing crises *along with* the other challenges.

We urge our members -- housing and homeless social assistance providers as well as advocates -- to share information about threats or violence against those experiencing homelessness as we remain attentive to changes in our state.

CCEH espouses a "housing first" philosophy and approach to ending homelessness. This means that housing should not be used as a reward for compliance with treatment plans, employment success or "good" aka docile behavior or sobriety. Instead, stable housing is the pathway to a more stable life, better employment and earnings, better compliance with behavioral health treatment, participation in income support programs.

We urge you to not only focus on bias and intimidation but on housing-based solutions to end homelessness. While economic security for all our residents remains elusive, the good news is that we have the tools to end homelessness, and urge you to support several of the provisions in the Governor's budget.

In particular, we urge your support for **rapid re-housing.** Governor Malloy's proposal includes an on-going commitment to rapid re-housing. It adds $500,000 ($250,000 each year) for housing relocation and stabilization services and short-term financial assistance to help homeless families move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability. CCEH views the rapid re-housing investment as a down payment on ending family homelessness in Connecticut. Rapid Re-Housing is a set of interconnected strategies:

1. Coordinated intake, screening and housing-based assessment
2. Housing search, landlord recruitment, and relocation assistance.
3. Housing stabilization supports, linkages to community services
4. Timed limited financial assistance (for up to 12 months). This may include transportation for housing search, first/last month's rent, security deposit, application fees, moving costs, utility connection fees and arrearages, and other costs depending on the needs of the family. Rental assistance structured as a shallow flat subsidy based on unit size and adjusted for each region.

We urge your support for anti-bias measures as well as rapid, supportive and affordable housing. Thank you.