

Written Testimony of Sloane Sandler, Homeless Ally
Before the Public Health Committee
March 15, 2012

In Support of SB 896, AN ACT CONCERNING A HOMELESS PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS

Hello Chairpersons Gerratana and Johnson and member of the Public Health committee. I thank you for the opportunity to speak here today. My name is Sloane Sandler and I am a Homeless Ally affiliated with Hands on Hartford and the UCONN School of Social Work. I am also a proud resident of the City of Hartford. I am here in support of the Senate Bill 896-AN ACT CONCERNING A HOMELESS PERSON'S BILL OF RIGHTS.

The homeless are arguably one of the most disenfranchised populations in the world. Individuals living on the street or in shelters are often without the essential basic needs such as adequate medical care, a healthy and balanced diet, safety from violent attack and abuse, or the right to fair and affordable housing. Without a place to call home, individuals are left with very few viable options. Many are able to stay at an emergency shelter, but there they encounter eligibility requirements, strict rules, unfair treatment and time limitations. Those that are not able to find temporary housing are forced outdoors, many times under bridges, in parks and in the woods or in desolate areas. The homeless are ostracized, alienated, and ignored. Due to media's negative portrayal of people living in homelessness, the public's perception of homeless individuals has caused continuous harsh treatment and a general lack of support. The homeless are forced to learn how to survive without adequate support from their communities, living hand to mouth with minimum resources.

We have not given enough attention or support to the growing number of individuals that live every day without their basic human needs. In fact, we as a community have proven to do more harm than good, choosing to exile and punish victims of homelessness rather than empower and assist.

I ask you to please protect the rights of close to 4,500 homeless individuals in Connecticut. I ask you to additionally amend Connecticut's fair housing law to including housing status as a protected category. In order to create sustainable progress among the homeless population, it is vital that we consider empowerment as a tool for progress. Please help my most at risk neighbors.

Thank you.

**ADDITIONS AND MAJOR POINTS TO THE
RAISED BILL NO. 896
CONNECTICUT HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS**

(1) At the present time, many Connecticut residents continue to face the specter of homelessness due to the severe shortage of affordable housing, the impacts of economic hardship and economic downturn in our state, and a shrinking social safety net.

(2) Article 1, Section 1 of the Connecticut State Constitution states in part, that "All [people] when they form a social compact, are equal in rights."

(3) In line with this essential statement of the common law, it is reaffirmed that no person should have these rights compromised, face unequal treatment, or suffer unnecessarily due to discrimination based on his or her housing status. This chapter intends to address and prevent the continuation of these negative impacts to Connecticut residents who lack a permanent home.

Each homeless person in this state has the right to:

- 1. Move freely and use public spaces, including public sidewalks, in public parks, on public transportation and in public buildings without harassment or intimidation from law enforcement officers, or others in the same manner as other persons.**
- 2. Equal opportunities for employment, and has the right not to face discrimination while seeking or maintaining employment due to his or her lack of permanent being that of a shelter or a social service provider.**
- 3. Receive emergency medical care, free from discrimination based on his or her housing status.**
- 4. Register to vote and receive necessary documentation to prove identity for voting without discrimination due to his or her housing status. The Secretary of State shall provide voter registration identification cards, free of charge.**
- 5. Protection from disclosure of his or her records and information provided to homeless shelters and service providers to state, municipal, and private entities without appropriate legal authority and the right to confidentiality of personal records and information in accordance with all limitations on disclosure established by the Federal Homeless Management Information System, Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, and the Federal Violence Against Women Act.**
- 6. Reasonable expectation of privacy with his or her personal property; to the same extent as personal property in a permanent residence.**
- 7. Receive equal treatment by state and municipal agencies without discrimination based on housing status.**