



Good morning Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and other honorable members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Amanda Girardin; I am the Project Manager with Journey Home, the organization charged with leading the Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness for the Greater Hartford Region. I am here today in support of the philosophy behind S.B. 896, An Act Concerning a Homeless Person's Bill of Rights.

Through my job I work with people who are experiencing homelessness, have been homeless, or are at risk of becoming homeless and the direct service providers who assist them. Almost every night, most, if not every single one of the 430 permanent shelter beds in the Greater Hartford region are full, and every morning most of the individuals, except families and the disabled, who fill those beds must leave the shelters. Imagine having nowhere to go between the hours of 8am and 5pm. Where would you go? What would you do with your belongings? How would you use the bathroom? For many of those experiencing homelessness, public space becomes a poor substitute for the private space they do not have. Laws that prohibit certain activities in public spaces therefore often end up disproportionately affecting the homeless simply because they utilize public space at higher rates and also because stereotypes that often come with the experience of homelessness result in selective enforcement of these laws.

In my work I have heard many stories from those who have experienced homelessness which suggest discrimination based on their homeless status. Individuals who have been asked to leave public park benches, where they were peacefully sitting during the middle of the day, because it was assumed they were up to no good. A gentleman who was informed they would not treat him for cancer because he didn't have a "permanent" place to recuperate. Another gentleman who was fighting to have his address changed at the post office because he had changed emergency shelters.

By criminalizing the homeless and denying them access to the rights that others freely have, not only do we do ourselves and those experiencing homelessness a moral injustice, but we harm our whole communities in tangible ways as well. Arrests and jail are very costly public "resources," and time spent behind bars is more expensive than time spent in emergency shelters. Letting a person's health issues worsen, instead of offering life saving care will result in more costly medical services later on. When we deny people services, job opportunities, or entitlements because of a lack of a permanent address, we only prolong the length of time they will remain homeless instead of allowing them to reach their potential as productive members of society.

I applaud the committee's, especially Senator Gerretana's, recognition of the injustice that occurs when someone is discriminated against simply because of their lack of a permanent residence. I urge the committee to pass SB. 896 and refer it to the Housing Committee to be attached to Connecticut's Fair Housing laws in such a manner that will allow for punitive action against those who violate the equal rights of or discriminate against those experiencing homelessness. Just as we have fought and succeeded in passing legislation to protect the rights of people on the basis of their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and disability, so too should we protect the rights of those who find themselves without a home.



**Journey Home, Inc.** is a nonprofit organization that works collaboratively to implement the Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in the Greater Hartford region by initiating best practices and innovative, sustainable solutions to prevent and end homelessness.

The towns covered by this Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness are:

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|---------------|---------------|
| Andover       | Manchester    |
| Avon          | Marlborough   |
| Bloomfield    | Newington     |
| Bolton        | Rocky Hill    |
| Canton        | Simsbury      |
| East Granby   | Somers        |
| East Hartford | South Windsor |
| East Windsor  | Stafford      |
| Ellington     | Suffield      |
| Enfield       | Tolland       |
| Farmington    | Vernon        |
| Glastonbury   | West Hartford |
| Granby        | Wethersfield  |
| Hartford      | Windsor       |
| Hebron        | Windsor Locks |

For more information on the current and developing initiatives of Journey Home and its partner organizations please visit: [www.JourneyHomeCT.org](http://www.JourneyHomeCT.org)