

Testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Committee

February 19, 2013

Support SB 648

An Act Concerning an Appropriation for Victory Gardens in Newington

Good afternoon, Senator Leone, Representative Hennessy, and members of the Veterans' Affairs Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano, and I am the Public Policy Director for Adult, State, and National matters for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. I am here today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to support Proposed Bill 648 'AN ACT CONCERNING AN APPROPRIATION FOR VICTORY GARDENS IN NEWINGTON'. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental illness. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups across the state, educational programs, and advocacy for improved services, more humane treatment and an end to stigma and economic and social discrimination. We represent individuals living with mental illness and parents and family members of individuals living with mental illness.

Proposed bill 648 would provide funding for case management services at Victory Gardens, a supportive housing project for homeless veterans and families at the United States Department of Veterans' Affairs Newington Campus by appropriating \$230,000 to the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

Permanent supportive housing is a successful, cost-effective and proven solution to ending long-term homelessness by combining an affordable home with services that support and empower people to live stable and productive lives. It works well for people who face complex challenges including homelessness, un- and under-employment, low income and serious, persistent issues, for example mental illness.

According to studies and reports, veterans are twice as likely to be chronically homeless than the general population. Also, forty-five percent of homeless veterans suffer from mental illness.ⁱ Mental health conditions veterans may have to deal with include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).ⁱⁱ The prevalence of PTSD for returning soldiers is thirty to forty percent, prevalence for head trauma and TBI is twenty percent. Veterans' average unemployment rate hovers around thirty percent.

The housing at Victory Gardens is being built as we speak, applications are expected to be accepted in March and individual veterans and veterans with their families should be able to start moving into their new homes in July. Thirty-seven out of the total seventy-four units are planned to be supportive housing units, meaning that 37 individuals and families will be able to start re-building their lives with the support of having access to specialized case management services, mental health services, medication management, daily living skills, parenting skills, employment supports on site, in the evening and on the weekend. This will only happen if funding for these vital services is being appropriated to DMHAS to be performed by staff from the Chrysalis Center, Inc. which is a non-profit organization, based in Hartford that provides supportive services to assist people to transform their lives. The Chrysalis Center is the supportive services provider of the preferred developer team which was selected to build, maintain and provide services for Victory Gardens.

Veterans have protected our country's freedom and democracy while oftentimes paying for it with their health, including physical, mental and emotional. Their ventures put them at risk for experiencing challenges such as homelessness or mental illness at exceptionally high levels. Re-integrating back into a community after a deployment is difficult for anyone. But when men and women return and have additional challenges to deal with including mental health conditions and/or are returning to be part of a family again and to take care of that family, these soldiers and their families need and deserve support services in order to be successful.

In order for people to be successful, the bricks and mortars of housing is not enough, it requires proven support services to achieve positive impacts on health and quality of living. Positive health impacts of supportive housing include a fifty percent decrease in emergency room visits and hospital inpatient days. Positive impact on employment includes a fifty percent increase in earned income. The positive impacts on treatment of mental illness is based on affording people their independence as well as support when it is needed.ⁱⁱⁱ

Veterans and their families living in the same community already have the camaraderie and powerful relationships that people who have experienced similar challenges oftentimes have. All they need now are the supports to re-build their lives with a healthy lifestyle component, individualized support services and plans to fit each person's and family's needs. Victory Gardens can be and is intended to be a place of healing, recovery and hope. I urge you to take the action necessary to make this place become just that and support the bill before you.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully yours, Daniela Giordano

241 Main Street, 5th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106 • (860) 882-0236 • (800) 215-3021

Fax: (860) 882-0240 • Website: www.namict.org

ⁱ *Ending Homelessness Among Veterans Through Permanent Supportive Housing*'. Volunteers of America, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans and Corporation for Supportive Housing. (2006), page 4.

ⁱⁱ NAMI National. Veterans Resource Center. Mental Illness and Veterans.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Ending Homelessness Among Veterans Through Permanent Supportive Housing*'. Volunteers of America, National Coalition for Homeless Veterans and Corporation for Supportive Housing. (2006), page 9.