

February 19, 2013

JOINT COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AFFAIRS TESTIMONY

Re: Proposed Bill No. 648 – AN ACT CONCERNING AN APPROPRIATION FOR VICTORY GARDENS IN NEWINGTON

Senator Slossberg, Senator Doyle, Representative Nafis, Representative Guerrero Representative Lopes, Representative Lesser and other distinguished committee members. I want to thank you for this opportunity to address Proposed Bill No. 648. I urge you to pass this important legislation.

My name is Sharon Castelli and I am the Chief Executive Officer for Chrysalis Center a social services organization services organization located in Hartford Connecticut.

In 2009, The Veterans Administration (VA) in Washington, DC sent out a Request for Proposal (RFP) for three states to develop a model program that would use existing VA land for the purposes of developing supportive and affordable housing for Veterans and their families. Connecticut was one of those three states. After a difficult competitive procurement process, Chrysalis Center, Demarco Management and the Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development were awarded the bid. The project was named Victory Gardens and would house 74 one, two and three bedroom units on the sprawling campus on the grounds of the Newington VA Medical Center.

Over the past 4 years since the project was awarded, over \$28 million dollars in Federal, State and private funding has been raised to complete the development; however there is one outstanding issue with the project; it lacks the necessary funding to provide the range of social services needed to support our Vets. In this time of increased focus on our Vets returning from war, it is critical to provide the support they need in this model of affordable and supportive housing at Victory Gardens.

Therefore, I am strongly encouraging that you pass Proposed Bill 648 to ensure that our Veterans get the support services that they have earned and deserve.

Many of you are aware of the invisible wounds our Veterans endure after serving for our country. Some abuse and are dependent on alcohol and drugs and many more suffer with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) and other mental health issues including anxiety and depression. About 10% of our Vets end up homeless.

Victory Gardens will be opening in May of this year; all 74 units will offer our Veterans and their families a new home and a place to start over.

While I realize we are in difficult financial times, never once did our Vets suggest they would not protect us because their pay check wasn't big enough. They served us and now it is time to serve them.

I urge you to pass Proposed Bill No. 648. Thank you.