

## WOMEN'S INSTITUTE



*Affordable and Supportive Housing*



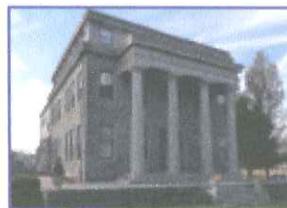
*Community Partnerships*



*Renovation and New Construction*



*Building Community*



*Preservation*

15 Court Square, Suite 210  
Boston, MA 02108

61 Main Street, Second Floor  
Middletown, CT 06457

(800)720-1195  
[www.wihed.org](http://www.wihed.org)

Mollye Wolahan, Deputy Director, Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, In Support of S.B. No. 648, February 19, 2013

I thank the entire Veterans' Affairs Committee for the opportunity to speak this afternoon. I am honored to be here today representing the Victory Gardens development project. My name is Mollye Wolahan and I am the Deputy Director of the Women's Institute for Housing and Economic Development, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing affordable housing and economic opportunity throughout Southern New England. The Women's Institute through its affiliated entity, Victory Gardens Housing, LLC, is the developer of Victory Gardens in Newington, CT.

We are currently constructing seventy-four units of permanent, affordable and supportive housing units with a preference for Veterans on an 11-acre leased portion of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) campus in Newington, Connecticut. Victory Gardens represents one of a select few housing developments in the country to be created under the VA's Enhanced-Use Lease (EUL) program, which makes VA lands and buildings available via long-term leases to private, housing developers selected by the VA. This is a part of the VA's efforts to end homelessness among Veterans in the next five years. The Women's Institute was selected as the preferred developer through a competitive RFP process to develop and own Victory Gardens. Through the EUL program, the VA has leased the property to Victory Gardens Housing, LLC, for a term of 75 years.

The development of Victory Gardens includes the rehabilitation of an existing historic structure built in the 1930s for twenty-four units of permanent supportive housing, as well as the new construction of fifty, one, two and three-bedroom flats and townhouses for families, all with a preference for Veterans. The new units will be arranged in seven, LEED-certified buildings facing a common green space and playground. All project units will be targeted to households earning 60% or below of area median income; twenty-seven units will be targeted to households with incomes below 25% of AMI. The project will address the critical shortage of affordable rental housing in Newington, assist the State in reaching its goals for the creation of permanent supportive housing, and further a national effort to support returning Veterans and to end homelessness among Veterans in the next five years.

The project is funded through the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development Housing Trust Fund/FLEX Program, a Connecticut Housing Finance Authority Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) 9% award, Federal Home Loan Bank of Boston Affordable Housing Program grant and subsidized construction and permanent project financing through Webster Bank, and VA Military Construction funds for infrastructure improvements to the VA campus. The Women's Institute leveraged the approximately \$7 million in State of Connecticut capital funding to raise the remaining \$21 million needed to complete the project. In partnership with the National Equity Fund, the LIHTC were sold to Morgan Stanley in what is one of Morgan Stanley's single largest LIHTC investments. As mandated by the State's LIHTC allocation for this project, 50% of the units at Victory Gardens, 37 total, are designed with a preference to house Veterans who are currently homeless or at-risk of homelessness. Rental Assistance Payments Vouchers from the State of Connecticut Department of Social Services are dedicated to these 37 units targeted for those Veterans who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Permanent supportive housing works. The Women's Institute is a leader in creating permanent, supportive housing in Massachusetts and Connecticut and we have witnessed not only the success of residents in this housing, but also the success of the neighborhoods and communities in which this housing is located. The Corporation for Supportive Housing defines this housing as "an innovative and proven solution to some of communities' toughest problems. It combines affordable housing with services that help people who face the most complex challenges to live with stability, autonomy and dignity." The total number of homeless Veterans in Connecticut are estimated from 900 to 1,600 persons. Based on the relationship between Veterans nationwide and homeless Veterans in the state, the number of homeless Veterans in the project area is estimated to be between from 275 to 480 persons at any one point in time. Our Veterans deserve this housing and we are proud of our efforts to successfully bring together the myriad of financial sources needed to complete these 74 units at Victory Gardens.

The VA Connecticut Health Care System and The Chrysalis Center will work in tandem to meet the varied and unique needs of all tenants, by providing supportive and medical services. Supportive services provided by The Chrysalis Center will include, but will not be limited to, individualized referral and access to health care, teaching and assistance with activities of daily living, advocacy, budget and economic literacy training, and employment services.

To provide the complete assistance to the Veterans who will be living at Victory Gardens, we need your assistance through this funding request to DMHAS to ensure that our supportive service provider can offer the full range of services to all of our residents; along with the specialized services needed to support our Veterans who will come to live at Victory Gardens from a homeless or an at risk of being homeless situation. Veterans in permanent and affordable housing have unique needs and our supportive services at Victory Gardens will be tailored to understand the impact that military service has on individuals and families including, facilitating access to Veteran and non-VA entitlements or benefits, understanding the culture of military service, and understanding the prevalence of post service medical conditions.

I thank you again for your time today and ask you to support S.B. No. 648 for our Veterans and their families at Victory Gardens.