

**Written Testimony of Kristen Granatek,
Manager of Technical Assistance and Program Services
Before the Public Health Committee**

March 15, 2013

In Support of: HB 6482 An Act Concerning Birth Certificates For Homeless Youth

Senator Gerratana, Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), and thank you for your consideration of matters of importance to individuals experiencing homelessness.

Connecticut's runaway and homeless youth face many barriers. One of the most common ones is having access to identification, including their birth certificate. Youth who are on their own have left home for many reasons. They may have been kicked out of their home after "coming out" to their parents as gay, lesbian or bisexual. They may be running from abuse or neglect. Or they may have been separated from their family members who are also experiencing homelessness. Many of them have no identification at all. It is our experience that parents or guardians often hold their child's birth certificate. The parent or guardian may refuse to turn it over to the youth, particularly in situations in which the youth is seeking emancipation. In some circumstances, the parent or guardian cannot be located or may refuse to talk to the youth about the birth certificate or other matters.

Youth who do not have access to their birth certificate are unable to obtain permanent identification, including a social security card, passport or driver's license. This hinders the process of enrolling in school, getting a job or getting access to needed entitlements. The changes proposed under *HB 6482: An Act Concerning Birth Certificates for Homeless Youth* will provide runaway and homeless youth with a legal mechanism for obtaining a birth certificate without the consent of their parent or guardian. The Act will put in place measures to verify the status of the youth as being homeless, through school or emergency shelter personnel. This is an important step toward eliminating some of the barriers that homeless youth face and allow them to move forward with obtaining safe and stable permanent housing.

CCEH espouses a "housing first" philosophy and approach to ending homelessness. This means that housing should not be used as a reward for compliance with treatment plans, employment success or "good" aka docile behavior or sobriety. Instead, stable housing is the pathway to a more stable life, better employment and earnings, better compliance with behavioral health treatment, participation in income support programs.

We urge you to not only focus on providing homeless youth with access to their birth certificates, but on housing-based solutions to end homelessness. While economic security for all our residents remains elusive, the good news is that we have the tools to end homelessness, and urge you to support several of the provisions in the Governor's budget.

In particular, we urge your support for **rapid re-housing**. Governor Malloy's proposal includes an on-going commitment to rapid re-housing. It adds \$500,000 (\$250,000 each year) for housing relocation and stabilization services and short-term financial assistance to help homeless families move as quickly as possible into permanent housing and achieve stability. CCEH views the rapid re-housing investment as a down payment on ending family homelessness in Connecticut. Rapid Re-Housing is a set of interconnected strategies:

- Coordinated intake, screening and housing-based assessment
- Housing search, landlord recruitment, and relocation assistance.
- Housing stabilization supports, linkages to community services
- Timed limited financial assistance (for up to 12 months). This may include transportation for housing search, first/last month's rent, security deposit, application fees, moving costs, utility connection fees and arrearages, and other costs depending on the needs of the family. Rental assistance structured as a shallow flat subsidy based on unit size and adjusted for each region.

Last biennium, Governor Malloy initiated a significant investment in affordable housing in Connecticut included \$120 million for affordable housing; \$30 million to preserve and upgrade public housing as the start of a ten year commitment; and over \$30 million for 300 units of supportive housing. The biennial budget also provides:

- **Supportive Housing.** The proposed budget also adds \$20 million in funding for 100 units of supportive housing, with an annualized \$1 million for rental assistance subsidies and \$1 million for services. There are approximately 2,500 chronically homeless individuals in Connecticut.
- **Affordable Housing.** Authorizes \$68 million in capital funding in each year of the biennium to create new affordable housing options for workers, youth and families.
- **Public Housing Revitalization.** Authorizes \$60 million in bonding (\$30 million in each year). Funding is supported with an annualized \$3 million for 300 new rental assistance vouchers.

We urge your support for measures supporting homeless youth as well as rapid, supportive and affordable housing. Thank you.