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Testimony on the H.B. 5030, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures for the Fiscal Year Ending  
June 30, 2015

Submitted by the National Association of Social Workers, Connecticut Chapter  
in support of the Tax Relief for Elderly Renters (Renters Rebate) Program

Senator Bye and Representative Walker and Members of the Committee, I am here as a member of the Legislative Committee of the National Association on Social Workers, which has 3000 members serving people in need throughout our State. We would urge your support for the restoration of the Rental Rebate Program as proposed by the Governor, and the increase in funding of \$6.5 million. We would also urge support for the 110 Rental Assistance Program vouchers for people with psychiatric disabilities in the Governor's budget.

As described by the State Office of Policy and Management, the Rental Rebate program framework is this:

*Persons renting an apartment or room, or living in cooperative housing or a mobile home may be eligible for this program. Renters' rebates can be up to \$900 for married couples and \$700 for single persons. The renters' rebate amount is based on a graduated income scale and the amount of rent and utility payments (excluding telephone and cable) made in the calendar year prior to the year in which the renter applies. Application may be made at the town social service agency, or the Assessor's Office, depending on the town, between April 1st and October 1st.*

A year ago, the program was sunset. Public Act 13-234 was passed in July 2013 and closed the Renters' Rebate Program to new applicants. Beginning April 1, 2013 any renter who did not receive a grant under the program for calendar year 2011 was not be eligible to apply for a rebate. Any renter who did receive a grant for calendar year 2011 continued to be eligible to apply. However, anyone who misses a year would no longer be eligible to apply.

The increase in the Rental Rebate Program would assist low-income seniors aged 65 and up who rent their homes as well as people aged 18 through 64 who are permanently and totally disabled who live on a low, fixed income. This program provides a check once a year of \$50 to \$900 per year, based on income, family size, and the cost of housing and utilities. The people who benefit, struggle to pay their bills and to put food on the table. In the City of New Haven, a 2012 study conducted on behalf of the Department of Elderly Services found that 41% of these low-income seniors have a difficult time being able to afford to buy the food they need to eat in a healthy way. These households count on these funds annually to meet critical needs. It may be that first oil delivery in the fall. They may be behind in their utility payments, and use this money to catch up. It may make it possible to buy the food for Thanksgiving, or a pair of warm boots for winter. These funds are spent in our cities and towns, benefitting the local economy. In FY 2012-13, the year before the sunset, payments statewide totaled \$24,803,337, paid to 48,140 recipients. The typical grant was in the \$400 to \$500 range. All but 9 communities benefitted: Bridgewater, Canaan, Eastford, Easton,

Hartland, Salem, Scotland, Union and Weston. After the sunset last year, total payments were \$21,471,187, paid to 40,878 persons.

We also know that there is a significant need to increase rental assistance for people with psychiatric disabilities. Such an investment saves money in the end by reducing the costs of emergency room care. 80% of those provided with supportive housing stay housed. One example of a population that would benefit from such vouchers is homeless older adults with psychiatric difficulties. New Haven has recently been a leader in the State in learning about, and beginning to mobilize to reduce the high number of elderly persons who are homeless. A significant number of those persons are people with chronic mental health issues.

We thank the Governor and Commissioner Edith Prague for their leadership to restore the Rent Rebate Program that is relied upon by some of the neediest people in our State. We thank the Governor for his desire to increase care through supportive housing for people with mental illness.

Thank you for your kind attention. I would be happy to respond to questions.