

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee
of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 11, 2014 Hearing on Conservation and Development
By The Reverend Catherine Zall, Executive Director
New London Homeless Hospitality Center**

Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony on the budget proposals intended to address the very real crisis of homelessness faced by too many of our neighbors. While a multifaceted approach is needed as we work to end homelessness, I would like to just very briefly focus on the need for rapid rehousing in our state's service mix. In particular I would like to share some data from our recent work that argues strongly in favor of the Governor's inclusion of \$650,000 in his proposed budget for rapid re-housing assistance. This assistance has proven highly effective in helping many of those experiencing homeless to exit shelter and return to permanent housing

The New London Homeless Hospitality Center (NLHHC) operates a 50 bed emergency shelter serving homeless adults in New London County. We serve over 500 people experiencing homelessness each year. In February of 2012 the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Administration (CHEFA) awarded NLHHC a grant to implement a comprehensive rapid rehousing program. Our goal was to shorten shelter stays by assisting individuals with income to move quickly from shelter back into permanent housing. At the same time, a special legislative appropriation created the New London County Fund to End Homelessness which gave us access to funding for short term rent subsidies and security deposits.

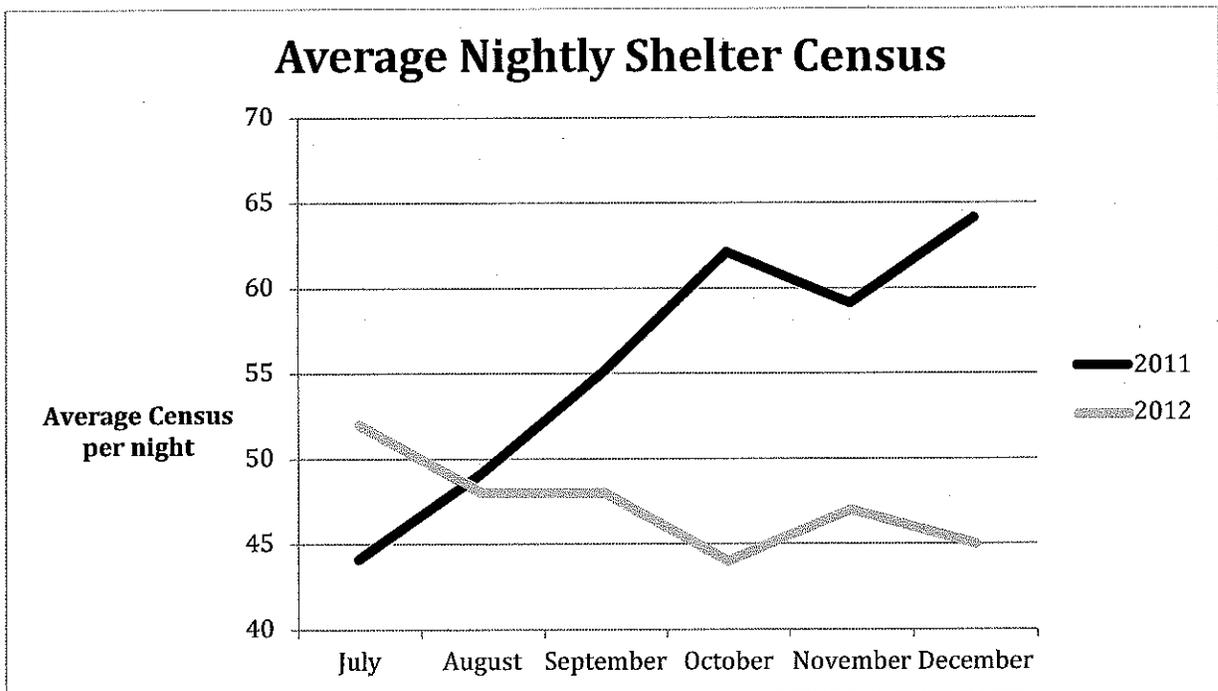
We documented two major outcomes in this intensive effort to provide rapid rehousing support, not just to a few, but also to all who could benefit. First, we confirmed that rapid rehousing addresses a key part of the homelessness problem. Some individuals who become homeless have income. Sometimes a temporary loss of work hours, a health crisis, the breakdown of a car or other disruption in work hours leads to a short term loss in income which quickly translates into the loss of housing. Homelessness often follows quickly. In other cases, individuals without income when they become homeless manage to find jobs and are struggling to begin new jobs while they manage in the shelter system.

In both these cases, homeless individuals who have income that could sustain housing are stuck in the shelter system because they do not have enough savings to meet the security deposit and first month's rent requirements for most apartments. This is the situation where rapid rehousing makes its most remarkable impact. In the one-year of our CHEFA grant we provided assistance with housing location, security deposits and/or first month's rent to 99 such individuals. All of these individuals would have experienced longer shelter stays without this assistance. Quicker return to permanent housing meant a greater ability to maintain employment, improved health and a higher quality of life. Follow-up studies

demonstrate that these benefits are sustained over time with fewer than 15% of those rehoused returning to homelessness.

Second, rapidly rehousing all eligible individuals had a dramatic impact on our shelter census. As illustrated below, in July of 2012 (before the implementation of rapid rehousing) our average nightly shelter census already exceeded our average for the previous year. Unfortunately demand for shelter was increasing.

Beginning in August of 2012 with the help of funding provided by CHEFA and the New London County Fund to End Homelessness we were able to implement an intensive rapid rehousing effort—housing almost 60 individuals in just a five-month period. Through this work, we were able to achieve dramatic reductions in our nightly shelter census. Getting people out more quickly means you serve more people but have fewer people in shelter.



It is hard to describe the difference in the quality of shelter experience that this decline makes possible. We have 50 beds in our shelter. In the winter months, however, we serve as our region’s “no freeze” option to assure that no one is left outdoors in cold weather. When demand exceeds our 50-bed capacity, we can offer only mattresses on the floor in an “overflow” location. Overcrowding makes the shelter nosier and more chaotic which is a major challenge for some of our guests who come to shelter with histories of trauma. Providing “overflow” capacity is also expensive compounding our financial challenge and drawing resources away from other needed services.

We all recognize that emergency shelter is a critical safety net service. None of us want to see our most vulnerable neighbors without a place of safety, especially in the winter. But equally, none of us want to see an ever expanding shelter system. Rapid rehousing is one key strategy to address both these objectives. Reducing shelter length of stay by helping people with income to leave shelter quickly dramatically increases the number of people who can be served in the shelter with the same number of beds.

Rapid rehousing works. It gives people the stability of permanent housing so they can succeed at newly acquired jobs. It makes our shelters more effective—making the same number of beds go further in meeting the need for shelter. It reduces the trauma of homelessness. It is a good investment for Connecticut. I urge the committee to support the Governor's proposal for additional resources for rapid re-housing in the proposed budget.

Catherine Zall
Executive Director
New London Homeless Hospitality Center
730 State Pier Road
New London, CT 06320

www.NLHHC.org

