



## Housing Committee Public Hearing - March 4, 2014

Testimony of Kim McLaughlin  
Director of Organizing, Publicly-assisted Housing Resident Network

**Subject: S.B. 363 - An Act Transferring Funds Deposited in the Community Investment Account to the Department of Housing**

**Request: ► SUPPORT allocation of \$150,000 annually to supplement technical assistance for resident participation and foster the development of independent, resident-led organizations in public housing communities.**

I would like to speak to you today in support of SB 363, and especially about the proposed annual allocation of \$150,000 to provide technical assistance for resident participation and to foster the development of independent, resident-led organizations in public housing communities. As the Director of Organizing for the Publicly-assisted Housing Resident Network, I feel that this is enormously important to residents of public and publicly-assisted housing as the state undertakes its ambitious plan to revitalize the state-sponsored housing portfolio over the next 10 years.

By way of background, the Connecticut Publicly-assisted Housing Resident Network, or PHRN for short, is an independent 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization of residents working to preserve and improve their publicly-assisted communities as a vital housing resource for Connecticut's low and very low income families. PHRN began in the late 1990s in order to bring the missing voice of public housing residents to the table in public policy debate and provide resident leaders with the tools to advocate for their housing and their communities. PHRN established its organizational independence in 2005, and today is a statewide network of active individual public housing resident leaders, dozens of local resident councils and several citywide resident organizations. PHRN is unique in Connecticut - we are the only statewide, resident-led organization that provides an independent voice for tenants in publicly-assisted housing. PHRN is committed to giving people the tools they need to advocate for their communities.

Driven by your leadership and vision, the public housing landscape in Connecticut has changed dramatically over the past three years. In 2011, we won passage of a new law, C.G.S. Section 8-64c, guaranteeing publicly-assisted housing residents important new rights before their community is sold or public funds are released for its revitalization. In 2012, the state embarked on a \$300 million campaign to revitalize its public housing portfolio; that effort is now beginning to unfold and will continue for ten years. Relationships between residents and

owners must be redefined in these new revitalized communities if they are to succeed for the long haul. Their relationships need to evolve from "tenant/landlord" and "us/them" to a genuine relationship of mutual respect. That can only happen if each sector is allowed to independently gain competence and confidence through education and training geared specifically for their sector. From that foundation, everyone can be encouraged to work together on their common agenda.

At one time, there were more than 17,000 units of housing developed and managed in the state-sponsored housing portfolio. Today, that number is approximately 13,000. Some of those lost units have been revitalized and privatized, others have been sold to the private market with more "market-rate" rent structures, while still others have been shuttered or demolished. As Connecticut embarks on a comprehensive effort to redevelop our affordable housing communities, we must seek to leverage community and resident resources to construct more housing to meet our pressing needs. And we certainly cannot afford to lose the affordable housing we already have.

For too long, residents in publicly-assisted housing have been missing from the decision-making table in their communities. With this bill, you recognize the need for that to change. The proposed allocation of funding to build residents' knowledge and skill set is the right thing at the right time. Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to answer any questions.