



**Housing Committee Public Hearing
March 4, 2014**

**SUPPORT SB 363 – AN ACT TRANSFERRING FUNDS DEPOSITED IN THE COMMUNITY
INVESTMENT ACCOUNT TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING**

Testimony of Betsy Crum, Executive Director

Senator Bartolomeo, Representative Butler, and members of the Housing Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Betsy Crum, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Housing Coalition. The Connecticut Housing Coalition represents the broad, vibrant network of community-based affordable housing activity across the state. Our more than 250 member organizations include nonprofit developers, human service agencies, resident associations, and diverse other housing practitioners and advocates. Founded in 1981, the Coalition works to expand housing opportunity and to increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing in Connecticut.

I would like to speak to you today in support of SB 363, An Act Transferring Funds Deposited in the Community Investment Account to the Department of Housing. First, it has been my distinct honor and pleasure to have worked closely with the new Department of Housing over the past year, both in my capacity at the Housing Coalition and as a member of the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing. Commissioner Klein and her staff have certainly hit the ground running, and have already proven their desire to be leaders in creating and preserving affordable housing. Their accessibility and transparency have been evident since the beginning, as has their focus on the central importance of housing in our collective lives and communities. And while CHFA did an excellent job administering the housing portion of the Community Investment Account since its inception, I do agree that the time is right for the Department of Housing to coordinate discretionary housing resources like those under this legislation.

Our Coalition also strongly supports the inclusion of \$150,000 in funding under the Community Investment Account for strengthening our public and publicly-assisted resident communities. All around Connecticut, the face of publicly-assisted housing is changing. Governor Dannel Malloy has committed \$300 million over ten years to revitalize and redevelop the State-Sponsored Housing portfolio, which includes approximately 300 multifamily rental properties totaling over 13,000 apartments. It is expected that some 10-20 public housing communities will be undergoing revitalization annually for the next decade.

Prior to the Governor's 2012 funding commitment, residents of publicly-assisted housing won passage of two new laws in 2011 that are transforming their relationship with their housing authorities. The first, codified as CGS 8-41, gives tenants the right to elect their own representative to the Housing Authority Board of Commissioners. The second, codified at CGS 8-64c, guarantees them an active voice in what happens when their homes and communities are being sold or revitalized. This right, already given to tenants of federal public housing, acknowledges that resident and community participation are key ingredients to the ultimate success of any project plan. As such, Housing Authorities and owners of state-sponsored housing developments must work in tandem with the affected residents throughout the development and revitalization process. That work must include developing and implementing a comprehensive, meaningful resident participation plan and negotiating an agreement for key elements of the housing to be developed.

The revitalization initiative coming over the next 10 years has the potential to bring great change to our state and to our housing communities. Residents of those communities have the most to gain or lose from this effort, and are perhaps the biggest stakeholders. And yet most of the residents who will be affected by the state revitalization program are not even aware of the new law, and fewer are prepared to use the tools it offers. To be effective partners, residents must have the tools, training, resources, encouragement and technical assistance they need step into the opportunities and challenges before them. It is important that their voices be strong and organized, and ready to represent the other residents living in their communities. And it is critically important that they develop these skills independently, without being influenced or prejudiced by the needs of landlords and funders.

For this reason, I would respectfully suggest amending the proposed language to ensure that this funding support independent, resident-focused technical assistance, as follows:

(A) One hundred fifty thousand dollars annually for grant-in-aid to a statewide organization of residents in publicly assisted housing to provide technical assistance for resident participation and foster the development of independent, resident-led organizations in public housing communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.