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Testimony for Public Hearing: SB No. 204

February 5, 2015

Lisa Tepper Bates  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness  
257 Lawrence Street  
Hartford, CT

Re: Proposed S.B. No. 204, an Act Concerning Best Practices for Protecting Senior Citizens  
From Interaction with Sexual Offenders.

Greetings Committee Members,

My name is Lisa Tepper Bates and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH), a statewide advocacy organization founded in 1982 by shelter staff and volunteers in response to increasing homelessness in our state. CCEH works with nonprofit providers of shelter and services to end each case of homelessness in our state.

On behalf of the providers who serve the homeless, and on behalf of the 14,000 people who will experience homelessness in Connecticut each year, I respectfully request that you record and consider our position on Proposed S.B. No. 204, concerning best practices for protecting senior citizens from interactions with sex offenders.

Providing safe and affordable housing for all Connecticut residents is critical to the health and well-being of all, and to the strength of our communities. A major cause of homelessness – an expensive public policy problem and a traumatic life event for our residents who experience it – is the lack of sufficient affordable housing in Connecticut. Legislation, like the provisions of SB 204, that might prohibit certain individuals from accessing the housing they need would be deeply unproductive for our communities and our state. The solution that we must focus on is

the expansion of affordable housing in Connecticut, so that we may meet the housing needs of all our residents.

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness supports, however, SB 204's proposal to revise the state's sex offender registry. We believe that the proposal to move from an offense-based system to an evidence-based risk assessment system is a very productive proposal. This proposed change could result in differentiating those who pose a true threat to public safety from those individuals who pose a low risk to public safety, but whose registry status impedes their ability to secure adequate housing, employment, and rehabilitative opportunities. This proposed modification to the Connecticut sex offender registry could help to make the registry a more effective tool in our collective efforts to create safer communities for all our residents by targeting our law enforcement efforts in the smartest way possible.

The exclusion of people on the sex offender registry from so many forms of housing and necessary services results in homelessness for many. Research shows that the instability of homelessness can substantively raise the re-offense risk potential of lower risk offenders. A base of housing security for all is critically important to both public safety and to those who are seeking to exit homelessness to regain stability and security to stabilize the lives of all members of their families. To end homelessness, and to make our communities safer and stronger, we need to increase housing opportunities, not impose further restrictions on low risk individuals whose options are already limited. To enhance public safety through the tool of the sex offender registry, we need to learn from the data available in this important field of public safety: registries based on risk assessment are better tools that allow targeting of law enforcement resources and limit the unintended and unproductive consequences of registries that do not take into account actual risk.

On behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, our members, partners and the people we serve, I urge you to vote favorably on promoting the use of evidence-based

practices that support both Governor Malloy's vision of a second chance society and our efforts to find an affordable home for every resident of our state.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on this important issue.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lisa Tepper Bates". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Lisa Tepper Bates  
Executive Director, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness