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February 3, 2015, Housing Committee Public Hearing
Written Testimony submitted by Cathy Branch Stebbins, Executive Director, CONN-NAHRO

Conn-NAHRO is the Connecticut chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials; its membership is comprised of Public Housing Authorities and other individuals and organizations involved in the management, operations and improvement of public housing in Connecticut.

Senator Winfield, Representative Butler and the Members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Cathy Branch Stebbins, I'm Executive Director of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials. CONN-NAHRO represents the interests of public housing authorities in Connecticut.

First, I would like to thank the Housing Committee and its Chairmen for presenting these proposed bills. Many of them affect housing authorities. I understand this hearing is to provide you with feedback on the concepts raised in the proposed bills. I do not have enough time to address every proposed bill that may affect our members so I am focusing on those that are most impactful to housing authorities.

Proposed S.B. No. 169 AN ACT CONCERNING PUBLIC HOUSING AND CHILD SAFE WINDOWS – We request clarification on the definition of what “child safe” and “remodel” means and to understand at what threshold the requirement will be triggered. CONN-NAHRO is available to work with this proposed bills’ sponsor.

Proposed H.B. No. 5307 AN ACT REQUIRING LANDLORDS TO MAINTAIN LOCKS ON TENANTS' WINDOWS.--- In anticipation of specific language, in general we support the simplified concept that require all landlords to have functioning locks on tenants’ windows and CONN-NAHRO is available to work with the proposed bills’ sponsor.

Proposed H.B. No. 6133 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF A FIRST OFFENDER STATUS FOR THOSE ACCUSED OF VIOLATING THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING LAWS. --- CONN-NAHRO is interested in seeing the specific language of this proposed bill. In general, we support the concept of education as a first approach.

Proposed H.B. No. 6132 AN ACT CONCERNING EMERGENCY POWER IN SENIOR HOUSING COMPLEXES --- We understand the goal of ensuring emergency power in senior housing but we are concerned about unintended consequences including who would bear the costs of purchasing, installing and maintaining the generators. We worry that housing authority staff would be expected to shelter frail residents in place during prolonged emergencies, which we are not properly staffed or trained for. CONN-NAHRO urges caution on this concept and reminds the bills’ sponsors that the state-sponsored elderly-disabled housing portfolio

receives no subsidies—the only income comes from the residents, themselves. CONN-NAHRO offers to discuss this proposed bill with the sponsors.

Proposed H.B. No. 5489 AN ACT CONCERNING REFERENCES MADE TO HOUSING AUTHORITIES. --- In general, we support consequences for giving a false reference on behalf of a housing authority applicant. We are interested in seeing the specific language and are willing to discuss the concept with the bills' sponsor.

Proposed S.B. No. 404 AN ACT CONCERNING THE MAINTENANCE OF A WAIT LIST FOR PUBLIC HOUSING -- CONN-NAHRO supports Sen. Kissels' proposed bill to allow housing authorities to manage its waiting lists by date and time or on a first-come, first-served and to mirror the federal regulations regarding the management of public housing waiting lists. Housing authorities believe the fairest way to manage the scarce resource of public housing is in this manner.

Proposed H.B. No. 6143 AN ACT CONCERNING A CENTRALIZED WAIT LIST FOR PUBLIC HOUSING. --- CONN-NAHRO supports the concept of managing its waiting list based on date and time. We recommend that the title of this proposed bill be clarified.

Proposed S.B. No. 405 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RETENTION OF SECURITY DEPOSITS FOR AGE-RESTRICTED PUBLIC HOUSING and Proposed H.B. No. 6142 AN ACT CONCERNING SECURITY DEPOSITS FOR AGE-RESTRICTED PUBLIC HOUSING.-- We call the committee's attention to a potential problem in the proposed bill language in both 405 and 6142. We believe the intention of Rep. Alexanders' and Sen. Kissels' bills is to allow a housing authority to maintain a tenant's security deposit for the lease term and not have to return it to the resident after one-year, as it is currently required to do. Housing authorities find that residents who have money on the line tend to leave the unit in good repair when they know their security deposit will be returned to them. Without this psychological incentive, many residents do not care about the condition they leave their apartments in, and this causes rent increases for all other residents, that is un-deserved.

Proposed S.B. No. 170 AN ACT PROTECTING HOUSING FOR SENIOR CITIZENS, Proposed S.B. No. 409 AN ACT EXPANDING AGE-RESTRICTED HOUSING OPTIONS FOR ELDERLY PERSONS, Proposed H.B. No. 6141 AN ACT CONCERNING THE EXPANSION OF AGE-RESTRICTED HOUSING OPTIONS FOR ELDERLY PERSONS and Proposed H.B. No. 6144 AN ACT CONCERNING AGE-RESTRICTED HOUSING OPTIONS FOR ELDERLY PERSONS. --- In anticipation of specific language, we support the concept of preserving state-sponsored elderly/disabled housing as age-restricted housing to be primarily occupied by elderly persons. You will hear from some of our housing authority practitioners that the balance between elderly and young tenants in state-sponsored elderly/disabled housing is changing, and that Connecticut is losing its supply of affordable elderly housing, as a result. This situation must be addressed in order to ensure the long-term sustainability and affordability of the housing portfolio.

In conclusion I would like to reiterate that CONN-NAHRO appreciates the many efforts of the Housing Committee to support the work of public housing authorities and we offer you the expertise and input of our practitioners. Thank you.