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Hello, my name is Meghan Manke and I am here to offer my full support for bill No. 18. I am a firefighter in Newington and also work for the local Fire Marshal's Office, where I play an active role in our local response to hoarding cases. My passion for the issue of hoarding also springs from my educational and professional background in psychology and human behavior.

I've encountered hoarding conditions on many occasions and, like many supporters in this room, can vouch for the gap in present collaboration efforts, as well as for the tragedy that can occur as a result. I can also speak to the need for increased training in this area, as well as an extreme gap in mental health and treatment options for those suffering.

These experiences have led to my position as a facilitator for the Statewide Hoarding Working Group, which began meeting last September after recognizing the long-standing, evident need for a more open, multidisciplinary discussion on the often taboo subject. The number of participants committed to this effort certainly speaks to the effectiveness and thus the need for more widespread implementation of a team approach to addressing the extremely complex issue statewide.

The Group has since grown to nearly 300 individuals, representing over 65 municipalities and an exciting array of professional fields. This very unique opportunity has allowed individuals from otherwise parallel fields to work jointly towards the common goal of implementing a more team-oriented approach to addressing and mitigating the issue within our own communities.

I would like to reference written testimony submitted to this committee by the Director of Health for the City of Milford, CT regarding the longstanding, positive impact of their community's team approach to the issue. Their initiative utilizes methodology similar to what has been identified by our statewide Working Group, in that they have a strong sense of interagency collaboration and communication, which includes efforts to ensure the safety, health, and overall well-being of members of their community, as well as those that protect and serve it.

Although similar, commendable efforts have been implemented within other towns and regions across the state, a very evident need for similar execution still exists throughout. As such, the establishment of a taskforce to study and identify best practices for addressing the issue in a more uniform and effective way is essential to the ongoing success of these local and statewide efforts, as well as to ensuring the health and safety of all Connecticut residents, officials, and first responders.

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