



ESTABLISHED 1659

CITY OF NORWICH
CONNECTICUT

NORWICH HUMAN SERVICES

Adult & Family Services–Youth & Family Services–Rose City Senior Center
Phone (860) 823-3778 Fax(860) 823-3793

80 Broadway,
Norwich, CT 06360

Date: March 16, 2015

To: Hon. Eric Coleman, Co-Chair
Hon. William Tong, Co-Chair
Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Lee-Ann Gomes, Director, Norwich Human Services and Chair of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness

Re: Opposition to Raised Bill S.B. 1087, An Act Concerning Sexual Offender Registration Laws, Residency Restrictions for Sexual Offenders and Reentry Housing

Dear Judiciary Committee,

I am the Director of Norwich Human Services and the current Chair of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness. My department encompasses the senior center and the town's youth and family service bureau. Part of my job is to help promote policies that ensure that all of our residents enjoy a good quality of life. Another significant portion of my job is to work on homelessness and housing issues. Homeless sex offenders do pose a risk to the community.

If you follow the news, you are aware that the City of Norwich has had many issues concerning the housing and placement of sex offenders. It has been reported that per capita, Norwich has the highest number of sex offenders in the country. A common misperception is that all sex offenders are pedophiles or rapists. There are others on the list who are not high risk and who do not pose a threat to public safety. Having a registry that distinguishes between these populations would be helpful to residents and human service agencies alike.

The sex offender registry is intended to be a tool to enhance public safety. I am an advocate of changing the current sex registry to include tiers that help distinguish between those likely to pose a high threat to public safety from those individuals likely to pose a low risk to public safety. This bill, however, over complicates the registry and imposes barriers to housing for even low risk-rated offenders. For those reasons, we do not support it.

I can attest to the detrimental effects the sex offender registry had had on the lives and well being of offenders who have minor infractions or have redeemed themselves over a period of years. No one wants to be "soft" on the issues of sex offenders, but the way in which the



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current system works does not allow for important distinctions to be made amongst this population because CT's system is based on offense and not risk.

Landlords and employers shy away from working with people labeled as sex offenders, despite the varying reason as to why they are on the registry. We believe this is an unintended consequence of the registry.

Currently, many shelters, housing developers, landlords and employers state that they do not “accept” sex offenders. People are blocked from housing and jobs, exasperating their situation and making it challenging for the community to find options for them.

Having a tiered system, that is based on reliable and valid risk assessments will allow for reasonable and rational distinctions to be made.

We believe that:

- Housed sex offenders are less likely to re-offend than homeless sex offenders
- Employers and landlords need a way to distinguish between different types of offenders. This should help lessen fears open doors for low risk offenders.
- Shelters need a way of discerning who is appropriate to stay at their facility
- Police resources are best focused on high risk individuals rather than the entire universe of offenders

A simple bill that creates a tiered registry, without imposing added residency restrictions, would help communities better address this population.

Sincerely,

LAGomes

Lee-Ann Gomes,
Director, NHS