



Donald A. Neel
Board Chair

Luis B. Pérez, LCSW
President & CEO

Testimony before the Housing Committee regarding:

**Opposition to
S.B. No. 157 – AN ACT CONCERNING ADEQUATE AND SAFE HOUSING FOR
THE ELDERLY AND YOUNGER PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

February 23rd, 2016

Senator Winfield, Representative Butler and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, my name is Suzi Craig and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy at Mental Health Connecticut. As an advocacy organization, direct service provider and educator, Mental Health Connecticut is on a mission to improve the mental health for all Connecticut residents.

I am here to speak in opposition to SB 157, "AN ACT CONCERNING ADEQUATE AND SAFE HOUSING FOR THE ELDERLY AND YOUNGER PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES."

The proposed bill states its purpose as the following: "to ensure adequate and safe state-assisted housing for the elderly and younger persons with disabilities." We believe this legislation will result in the opposite outcome.

SB 157 calls for a study of residents displaced from housing designated for the elderly and disabled, recommendations for gaps in services, and a list of disputes among tenants over a four-year period. These initiatives, on the surface, may seem harmless but in reality they are a conduit for possible discrimination to occur against the elderly or persons with disabilities.

Excluding or limiting the number of people with disabilities in state-funded elderly housing goes against over 50 years of public policy in Connecticut and violates state and federal antidiscrimination laws. This legislation will allow for discrimination to occur and takes our focus away from solving our biggest problem: a housing shortage.

Affordable housing is a cornerstone of recovery for the nearly 500 people we serve in our residential housing services. Without housing, people cannot focus on their health and wellness. Rather, all of their efforts are focused on meeting their most basic needs, including securing shelter. We are reminded of the importance of housing for the people we serve every day. With their housing and basic needs met, they are able to focus on their recovery, further their education, participate in the work force, and establish relationships that promote health, wellness and integration in their communities.



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Partnership for Strong Communities notes that Connecticut's housing is "too expensive and too scarce." A housing shortage and homelessness are much bigger obstacles to overcome than identifying housing disputes – which, as is the case for any resident, can be handled through our state's many landlord-tenant laws.

However, the expansion of that housing cannot occur based on the exclusion of people living with disabilities.

We would like to recommend that SB 157 does not move forward. Alternatively, we recommend investing in ways to work together to increase opportunities for the elderly and those with disabilities to access safe and affordable housing and the essential services that will allow them to stay in their homes and remain a part of their community.

Thank you for your time and for your service.

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