Testimony by Alyson Heimer, Hamden, CT
In Support for SB 425: AN ACT CONCERNING MUNICIPAL TRANSPARENCY, EFFICIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

To Co-Chairs: Senator Cathy Osten and Representative Philip Miller, and Honorable Members of the Planning and Development Committee:

My name is Alyson Heimer, I live in Hamden, CT and I work at SeeClickFix. I am here to testify in favor of SB 425.

I started using SeeClickFix in 2009 when I lived in my hometown of New Haven. I used the platform to communicate concerns to my Alder and check on the progress of how those concerns were being addressed by the city. Through the platform my neighbors, the alder and I decided that it would be beneficial to create a block watch group. We met up to discuss the increase in crime that had come to the city during the early days of the recession.

At the time, only some city officials were listening, and we did use the platform to report issues to the city. But we also used the platform to keep one another informed, to determine what projects the parks clean up team should focus on during clean ups once a month, to learn about what other people in other parts of city were concerned about. I saw it as a tool for citizens, an amazing gateway to local government process and a key component in what has now been 7 years of advocating for my community.

Last summer, when I moved from New Haven to Hamden, I was frustrated that it took so much longer when reporting an issue to get a response – that in order to follow up I had to call in and leave a voicemail or send an email to a general mailbox. I was overjoyed to learn that Hamden was going to be using SeeClickFix because it meant I wasn't going to have to scream into the ether, I was going to be able to interact with my government again.

I applied for a job at SeeClickFix because I knew I'd be helping people. There are two kinds of helping when it comes to citizen services - there is (of course) the hard work of filling potholes, cleaning up, fixing, doing, making, planning and providing services to residents. And then there is the enablement portion to give residents the tools to have their voices heard, to prioritize those requests, to engage on issues, and convert complainers and squeaky wheels into pro-active, engaged and informed members of the community.

SeeClickFix knows how thankless this kind of work can be and that's why there's a giant Thank You button for residents to push when their issues are fixed. It's acknowledging the hard work. It's important to say thank you, and on this platform you can thank the person who helped you even when you don't know who it was who repaired the sidewalk or painted over the graffiti. It's a simple but beautiful

thing that helps connect citizens to government workers – and makes sure public service employees feel appreciated.

It's all that hard work that happens behind the scenes that is precisely why this bill is important. To enable all towns in Connecticut to take advantage of a platform that allows for open, transparent communication, it's going to transform our state and increase the quality of life for the people who live here.

The transparency is important because having the system be open ensures that public entities will be held accountable. These kinds of platforms let government officials directly tell a citizen, "I acknowledge that you have a problem and that it's something we can take care of." Better still, it provides a way to set expectations: they can say, "we see you, we know that pothole needs fixing, but actually the timeline is a little long on this issue because we're not just going to fix just that one pothole, the whole street will be repaved next month." The community frustration, disengagement, and apathy is cut in half.

These systems can be such a powerful tool – and that's without even mentioning the internal tools for government officials to manage, track, analyze, communicate on, and prioritize issues.

I am so proud that our state is considering this grant assistance so more communities can provide similar systems for citizens. I hope you will support SB 425 and see the immense value that this program has for such a small price tag compared to the cost of losing residents and businesses when they grow tired of screaming into the ether.

Thank you.