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TOWN OF NEWINGTON

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Fire Marshal's Office



Chris R. Schroeder
Fire Marshal

My name is Meghan Manke and I am writing to offer my full support for SB 119 – An act establishing a task force to study hoarding. I am a firefighter in Newington, Captain of the Newington Fire Prevention Bureau, and also work for the local Fire Marshal's Office, where I work extensively on cases of hoarding. My passion for the issue of hoarding, and thus for SB 119, also springs from my comprehensive educational and professional background in both psychology and hoarding behaviors. I also serve as a facilitator for the Statewide Hoarding Working Group, which began meeting in 2014 after recognizing the vast and far reaching issues that SB 119 aims to examine.

Hoarding is an extremely complex and multifaceted behavior that is quite often the symptom of an underlying mental illness. First responders and code enforcement officials encounter these hazardous conditions at an overwhelming frequency, however are not equipped with the training or skills to successfully and appropriately intervene in these cases. Furthermore, research has shown that enforcement-driven 'clean outs' are unsuccessful when not paired with appropriate mental health support and treatment. In fact, more than 70% of the time the hazardous hoarding conditions both return and are twice as bad within six months of such a cleanout. Unfortunately, there is an extreme gap in mental health treatment options for those who are suffering. In turn, research then supports the fact that the extensive hours, labor and efforts put in by enforcement efforts ultimately go unresolved and / or worsen within just a few months.

The most effective method for influencing real, long term change is for municipalities to adopt a team-based approach to identifying, mitigating and addressing hoarding cases in their communities. I can personally 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, for everyone from the first responder who happens upon a hazardous condition, to the enforcement officials tasked with mitigating that hazard, to the social services and mental health providers tasked with long-term management of the individual and their hoarding behaviors.

I implore you to consider the present odds and system we have in place regarding hoarding here in Connecticut: municipal enforcement officials in each town are tasked with enforcing health and safety codes, in the homes of the 2-5% of the population who suffer from this mental illness, who then defer to the considerably smaller handful of mental health clinicians in the state who are trained and available to treat people who hoard. The odds are and have been against us. Hoarding impacts every aspect and individual in our communities, yet we still have yet to sit down at the state level to have a genuine, open conversation about what could and should be done to address any one of the many factors at work here.

For these reasons and so many more I offer my full and unwavering support for SB 119 and all that it represents in regards to bringing this issue to the forefront so as to examine these long standing issues at a broader level. I also offer my expertise to the committee, should testimony today result in further inquiries or concern. I sincerely thank you for your time and consideration of SB 119.