

# Housing Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5242

AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE

**Title:** RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION.

**Vote Date:** 3/10/2020

**Vote Action:** JF To Appropriations

**PH Date:** 2/27/2020

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

The Housing Committee

Co-Sponsors: [Rep. David Michel, 146th Dist.](#) & [Sen. Saud Anwar, 3rd Dist.](#) & [Rep. Jeff Currey, 11th Dist.](#)

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Transitional programs are necessary to assist those exiting incarceration to provide housing opportunities to prevent them from exiting into homelessness. Early screening prior to an inmate's release date would provide enough time to obtain services through United Way. Programs that assist the formerly incarcerated obtain housing help to reduce recidivism.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

Christine Perra Rapillo, Chief Public Defender – Division of Public Defender Services – State of Connecticut – supports – As drafted the bill would focus on persons who may become homeless upon release from incarceration by assessing housing needs including homelessness risk, family support, prior employment and housing searches for utilization in the person's re-entry plan. Section 2 of the bill mandates the Departments of Correction and Housing create a *returning home program* to assist persons released on parole or to a supervised community setting. A report to the General Assembly is required regarding homelessness and needs of incarcerated persons. Obtaining stable housing is one of the main challenges our clients face when reentering the community from incarceration. While the Department of Correction makes efforts to ensure that returning citizens have safe living arrangements, resources are limited and particularly challenging for individuals being discharged at the end of a sentence. Any attention or resources that can be devoted to

increasing housing options for returning citizens will help improve their outcomes and enhance public safety.

Trina Sexton- Director of Reentry Services & Erin Forrest, Counselor Supervisor – Reentry Services, Department of Corrections – State of Connecticut – supports -The Department of Corrections is committed to providing programs and services to help prepare individuals for successful reentry. Housing is the foundation to successful reentry yet securing stable, safe housing is one of the greatest challenges for some of the men and women returning to the community. In a review of research conducted on a national level, the connection between incarceration and homelessness is well documented. Those experiencing multiple incarcerations are likely to have higher rates of homelessness. Individuals cycling in and out of the correctional system are more likely to experience housing instability or homelessness prior to admission.

Of note, the proposed language of the revised risk assessment strategy in this bill requires the Department of Correction to "screen all offenders [...] to assess their housing needs and homelessness risk" and that "such assessment shall be used to inform the offender's reentry plan under **section 2 of this act.**" **While the agency supports the concept, this cannot be done within available appropriations.** The Department of Correction recommends the homelessness screening apply only to the sentenced population in alignment with most aspects of the risk assessment strategy.

The Department of Correction is committed to working with the CT Coalition to End Homelessness to develop a homeless screening and assessment tool that will likely be incorporated into an existing review process that assesses community resource needs throughout the individual's sentence. This mechanism can be modified to capture risk of homelessness in additional to other pertinent reentry related needs.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

Kathleen Flaherty – Esq - Executive Director - CT Legal Rights Project Inc – P.O. Box 351 Middletown, CT 06457 – supports - We know that people returning to the community from DOC custody face barriers to housing. HB 5242 would prevent people from being discharged from corrections into homelessness. I urge this committee to support the bill.

Richard Cho - Chief Executive Officer & Sarah Fox - Director of Advocacy and Community Impact - Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) - 257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 – supports and believes that this bill will help to address a major driver of homelessness in our state, which is involvement in the criminal justice system. Data analysis that my organization has conducted found that 20 percent of people who wind up in homeless shelters in our state are people who have been recently released from the Department of Correction (DOC) custody. That amount is equivalent to approximately 1,200 people every year who are in shelters. This number does not even include people released from the Department of Correction who wind up homeless on the streets, in tents, or sleeping in vehicles. We also know that a significant number of homeless men and women are also under probation supervision. Our data analysis also showed that incarceration did not cause homelessness among the majority of individuals, but rather, most individuals have been going around a revolving door between prisons and homelessness for decades: individuals enter prisons, are released to homelessness, fail to comply with their probation or parole supervision or are rearrested, and wind up back in prison and the whole cycle repeats itself. This is not only a human tragedy, but a failure of our public systems.

The solution is to provide the Department of Correction with the tools, the resources, and the accountability for preventing homelessness (or returns to homelessness) among people discharged from prisons.

We believe that HB 5242 would provide DOC with these tools, resources, and accountability:

- We agree that the Department of Correction should screen all inmates entering DOC custody for housing needs and homelessness risk so they can proactively identify which inmates will require housing assistance.
- We agree that DOC should work with the Department of Housing to develop an evidence-based program to assist people reentering the community from prison to obtain stable housing in the community. We think this program should be modeled after successful models like rapid re-housing in which community-based non-profit organizations are contracted to provide housing search and navigation, housing application assistance, and short-term rental assistance for people released from DOC who are identified as having prior homelessness histories or being at-risk of homelessness. This type of model has been shown to successfully house people at a cost of approximately \$7,600 per person, including rental assistance and services.
- We agree that DOC should report on outcomes and also to report on how many people are in need of housing assistance, how many are served, what their outcomes are, and how many identified did not receive assistance.
- We agree with the idea that we should track the impact of this program to see if we are cutting the number of people released from DOC in the last three years who wind up homeless from the current baseline of 1,200 per year.
- We think this program should ideally be funded at a \$3 million level that—at a per person cost of \$7,600—would enable DOC to serve nearly 400 individuals per year, which should enable DOC to bring the number of people who experience post incarceration homelessness from 1,200 to zero within three years. We also think HB 5242 could be strengthened by expanding its scope to include a focus on preventing and addressing homelessness among probationers. This could include:
  - Requiring the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) at the Judicial Branch to screen and track homelessness and housing status among probationers,
  - Requiring CSSD to work with the Department of Housing to create a similar housing program for probationers and providing \$3 million in funding to support this program to serve 400 probationers every year,
  - Requiring CSSD to track and report on the impact of this program on reducing recidivism among probationers.

With these additions, HB 5242 would have the impact of decreasing the number of people who enter homeless services by 20%.

In addition, HB 5242 would have greater impacts on public safety—reducing rates of arrests, technical violations, and convictions among people released from prison and who are under probation supervision. We believe it will ultimately save taxpayer dollars while also helping people to rebuild their lives, rather than stay on a revolving door between prison and homelessness.

Kiley Gosselin – Executive Director – Partnership For Strong Communities – 227 Lawrence Street, Hartford, CT 06106 – supports House Bill No. 5242 and its purpose to require the Department of Correction to assess the risk of homelessness for incarcerated persons released from its custody, create a program to address such homelessness, and measure the extent of such homelessness. Individuals exiting the criminal justice system are at a much higher risk of experiencing homelessness. Increasing supports to successfully transition out of the criminal justice system into housing could lead to a decrease in homelessness and housing instability for this vulnerable population.

Elizabeth Hines – Executive Director – Community Partners in Action – supports – **our staff are on the front line of reentry** and have observed the significant challenges people face when they discharge from prison to homelessness. **We are deeply concerned about the large number of people who are being discharged into homelessness after prison. Therefore, we strongly support an approach that would reduce the number of people discharging from prison into homelessness.**

Cathleen Meaden – Director of Housing Services – Columbus House – New Haven, CT – supports – I have worked in the housing field for over 25 years with a significant concentration on the housing of individuals leaving the criminal justice system for over 15 years. I currently oversee the CSSD pilot program for Rapid ReHousing of individuals on probation. I previously ran the Re-Entry Assisted Community Housing (REACH) program for 10 years. During this time one thing has become increasingly clear to me. If we are really invested in reducing recidivism and reducing the size of the prison population then we MUST address housing. In order to survive at the most basic level human beings need air, food, water and shelter. We would never say someone has to earn the right to air, food or water. We understand it as a necessity to life. Yet, we have historically said that housing is something that must be earned. I hope that you choose to support Raised Bill No. 5242 and expand it to the CSSD population.

Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance – 75 Charter Oak Avenue Suite 1-100 , Bldg. One, Hartford, CT 06106 – supports - The Alliance and our members, are greatly concerned about the extensive numbers of individuals who are being discharged into homelessness, following their release from incarceration. We commend the Committee for your leadership and vision, in raising HB 5242, which stands to play a critical role in addressing many areas of concern. The correlation between homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system, is well documented. In March 2019, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homeless (CCEH) provided the Office of Policy and Management with data from Jan 1, 2016 to Jan 1, 2019 - retrieved from the Homeless Management Information System, to cross match with the state's criminal justice databases. The key findings are staggering: • 8,187(48%) of persons who used the shelters between 2016 to 2019 had a DOC record • 3,562 (21%) of persons who used the shelters within 2016 to 2019 were also released from DOC within same time frame.

The Alliance supports the concepts and recommendations presented in H.B. 5242, including:

- Screening of all inmates entering DOC custody for housing needs and homelessness risk
- Collaboration between DOC and the Department of Housing to develop an evidence-based program to assist people reentering the community from prison to obtain stable housing in the community
- Reporting of outcomes by DOC regarding the number of individuals in need of housing assistance, the number served and numbers who are under-served
  - Tracking of the impact of this program to determine long-term outcomes. In addition, The Alliance recommends the following additional considerations:
- Expanding the scope of this legislation by including a focus on preventing and addressing homelessness among probationers as follows:
  - o Require the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch to screen and track homelessness and housing status among probationers
  - o Require CSSD to work with the Department of Housing to create a similar housing program for probationers
  - o Require CSSD to track and report on the impact of this program on reducing recidivism among probationers.

We urge the Committee to support H.B. 5242, and to consider the recommendations of The Alliance, as noted. Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Kelly McConney Moore – Policy Counsel – ACLU - 765 Asylum Avenue, First Floor Hartford, CT 06105 – supports - All people in Connecticut, including people who have a criminal record, have the right to safe and stable housing. Yet at any given time, approximately 25 percent of the state’s homeless population are also living with a criminal record.<sup>1</sup> Without stable and safe housing, it can be difficult for people reentering society to obtain and keep employment. Lack of stable housing can also contribute to increased recidivism for people who are formerly incarcerated.<sup>2</sup> For these reasons, the ACLU-CT applauds the intention of House Bill 5242, which requires the Department of Correction to evaluate the risks for each person reaching the end of their incarceration, and to track and report figures for homelessness among people who have recently returned to their communities. The bill’s plan to create a partnership between the Department of Correction and the Department of Housing to provide housing assessment to people assessed to be at risk of homelessness is also an important step in ensuring stable and affordable housing for people returning home from incarceration. We support all these efforts.

This bill, however, could do even more for people reentering the community by prohibiting housing discrimination against them. The ACLU-CT urges this Committee to support this bill and to amend it to make it even more effective and robust.

Several folks from the City of New Haven provided testimony in support of HB-5242.

Mayor of the City of New Haven – Justin Elicker

Aicha Woods – Director of the City Plan department

Rafael Ramos – Livable Cities Initiative

Aldersperson Evette Hamilton –

Dr. Karen Dubois-Walton - Housing Authority Director

Jenna Montesano – Deputy Director of City Plan for Zoning & Habitat for Humanity of Greater New Haven.

This bill takes important steps to addressing different challenges both in development of housing and in the prevention of homelessness.

New Haven has proposed legislation that would create regional affordable housing trust funds to stimulate the development of affordable housing projects in a larger geographic region. As towns continue to resist affordable housing, this would be a step towards bridging the gap and providing an incentive to develop their affordable housing stock. That being said, if action is not taken swiftly, we cannot afford to wait. I ask that this committee focus on the urgent need to develop quality affordable and deeply affordable housing throughout the state and to take whatever actions necessary to ensure that every municipality does its part to provide affordable housing.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Stated.

**Reported by: Karen Godbout**

**Date: 03/09/2020**