



**Testimony  
Betsy Gara  
Executive Director  
Connecticut Council of Small Towns  
Before the Planning & Development Committee  
February 21, 2024**

**RE: [HB-5174](#): AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY SHELTER UNITS FOR PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS LOCATED ON REAL PROPERTY OWNED BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS.**

Although HB-5174 is well-intended, the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) has concerns with the proposal which, as drafted, authorizes the as-of-right approval of up to eight temporary shelter units of up to 400 square feet on property owned by religious organizations.

Addressing the needs of individuals and families experiencing homelessness is certainly a laudable and challenging goal. However, as proposed, the bill would sidestep important local zoning and land use regulations, undermining the ability of municipalities to manage their communities appropriately. For example, many properties owned by churches and other religious organizations consist of small lots located in historic districts or main streets that may not be appropriate to support such temporary structures.

This is why local zoning and land use laws are designed to consider important factors in determining whether a location is appropriate for certain structures, such as site restrictions, setback requirements, environmental issues, and traffic and public safety concerns. We are concerned that HB-5174 would undermine opportunities for local officials to enact and enforce zoning and land use regulations to protect the safety and welfare of residents and businesses within their community.

We understand that prefab temporary shelter units have been utilized in some communities to mitigate homelessness, including in Connecticut. Rather than mandating the approval of such units as of right, however, lawmakers should explore opportunities to assist municipalities in working with religious and other organizations to address homelessness, including identifying best practices and model zoning changes regarding the approval process for prefab shelter units to ensure such units do not create any concerns. In addition, the state should continue to support efforts to convert unused and vacant building spaces into shelters and expand existing shelters.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue.



*COST is the voice of Connecticut's small towns, representing smaller communities throughout the state on a wide range of public policy issues.*