

Name: Rev. Matthew Lindeman

Title: Rector

Organization or Agency: Saint Peter's Episcopal Church

Topic: HB05174 - AAC TEMPORARY SHELTER UNITS FOR PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS LOCATED ON REAL PROPERTY OWNED BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS.
Opposes

Testimony:

Good afternoon. My name is Rev. Matt Lindeman and I am the senior pastor or Rector of the Episcopal Church in downtown Milford Connecticut.

I write in opposition to this bill.

I represent a faith community that has been engaged with our local agency partners to step in and alleviate specific challenges pertaining to people living in inadequate shelter during the winter season.

Prior to the pandemic, our congregation was able to the challenge and invitation, expressed by the Beth el Center in Milford, and we were able to collaborate together to provide more adequate and dignified, shelter to rest and return to their daily life and work during the winter season.

On Christmas Eve in 2019, we were retelling the story of the holy family, seeking shelter and finding none. While we were retelling that story, we were able to put our faith into practice, as we were simultaneously hosting some of the most vulnerable members of our population. Under our roof, there was "room at the inn."

It was an honor, and a privilege to do this work, to walk in our faith, to provide "room at the inn" and to fill in a gap that had exceeded the capacity of our partners in the nonprofit and government space. We did not function beyond standard of care. We simply collaborated and offered safe space for people who would otherwise be on the street in the coldest months of the year.

We worked in partnership with our fire department, our first responders, and our neighbors at City Hall to work toward best practices that allowed for safe sheltering of the vulnerable, thereby reducing the workload of our civic and nonprofit partners.

Members of our community experiencing homelessness were under a safe roof, not crowding the local emergency department at the hospital, or begging entry at the local firehouses, being victimized by predatory persons and systems..

I call upon my siblings in Connecticut, and in this legislature to protect the ability of faith communities, operating within reasonable standards of care and in collaboration with civic and agency partners, to continue their work attending to the vulnerable.

Passing of this bill does not end the housing crisis. It does not offer solutions to the challenges facing our government and nonprofit systems. It only seeks to deny beloved children of God their dignity, and responsive people of god their constitutional rights to practice faith in a loving, life giving God that demands attending to the vulnerable.

I find it particularly cruel that this bill should come to the floor at a time when the housing crisis in Connecticut is raging at unseen levels, and invite those lobbying for it to spend a few nights outside, hours on the phone with an u derduded 211 system, years in waiting lists for affordable housing as required research before punching holes in the lifeboats that faith communities are able to offer.

Thank you.
Rev. Matt Lindeman

Rector of St Peters Episcopal Church
Milford, Connecticut