



**Testimony in Support of Raised Bill No. 7033 with comment, An Act Prohibiting a Municipality from Imposing Any Penalty on Homeless Persons for Performing Life-Sustaining Activities on Public Land**

**Housing Committee Hearing**  
2.27.2025

Good morning, Representative Felipe, Senator Marx, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. My name is Sarah Fox, and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH). Through CT CAN End Homelessness, we lead the statewide effort to prevent and solve homelessness.

Recently, a loved one of mine was living in their car and for a moment, I saw the world through their eyes. When they sought medical help in upstate New York, they were turned away—dismissed not as a patient, but as a drug seeker. Back in their car, their lung machine’s battery dying, they reached for a drink of orange juice—only to realize, too late, that it was urine.

Over the next few days, we spoke often. What struck me most was not just their fear or exhaustion, but their biggest concern—something so basic that most of us never have to think about: Where could they go to the bathroom? Think about that for a moment: they carried the deep shame of being forced to make impossible choices, of being treated as though their very existence was a problem—of not having access to something so many of us take for granted. And beyond that fear, was the loss of their belongings, critical to their sense of self, critical to their humanity.

This is not just about dignity—it is about life and death.

Last year, more than 50 people died in the city of New Haven alone while experiencing homelessness. This winter, at least 8 more people have died, unable to come into warmth. Right now, one in four people seeking Cold Weather Emergency Response, outside of the Governor’s Severe Cold Weather Protocol, are turned away because there simply is no space available. These numbers are not just statistics. They are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, siblings, and neighbors. They died not because they refused help—but because help was not available to find them an open door.

Within the Homeless Response System, we all agree that criminalizing homelessness is not only wrong but also ineffective. This is not a controversial statement. Punishing people for having nowhere else to go does not reduce homelessness—it only deepens the crisis. Fines, tickets, and arrests create additional barriers, making people less likely to seek help, particularly women with children and youth—some of our state’s most vulnerable populations.

At the same time, we recognize that municipalities have a right to ensure that public spaces remain safe and accessible for all residents. Cities and towns need tools to work with their communities to minimize disruptions while also upholding the dignity and rights of every person. This bill does not

take those tools away—it simply ensures that no one is punished for lacking a home when no adequate alternatives exist.

Leading up to the legislative session, CCEH, through our CT CAN End Homelessness campaign, met with nearly a dozen mayors across the state to gather their feedback on our legislative agenda and discuss the realities of homelessness in their communities. These conversations revealed a shared fundamental goal: ensuring that no one is criminalized for lacking a home while also helping municipalities respond effectively to visible homelessness.

Municipal leaders made it clear that they do not want law enforcement to be the primary response to homelessness, yet they often feel they have no alternative. When someone is experiencing a crisis outdoors, they want to call a mobile health team—not the police. They stressed the urgent need for expanded outreach services, behavioral health crisis teams, and safe spaces where people can go. What cities and towns need are the right tools to address homelessness—solutions that reduce harm, provide real pathways to housing, and stabilize communities. Short-term fixes that simply push people from one town to another are not the answer.

At the heart of this issue is bystanderism. Bystander theory teaches us that when responsibility is diffused across many people, individuals are less likely to intervene. When we pass a person sleeping on a sidewalk, we assume someone else will help. When a city forces a person to move along rather than offering housing, we assume another town or agency will step in. And when people die on our streets, we tell ourselves that it was inevitable—that the system is too broken to fix. But homelessness is not inevitable. It is a policy choice. And today, we have a choice: to stand by or to take action to find an open door for all who seek it.

*So, how do we get there?* I think we can do so by recognizing that everyone is seeking solutions and ensure that we each play the right role in that process. That is what helps us get beyond villainizing anyone—whether people experiencing homelessness, municipal leaders, or residents who want safe and thriving communities.

This bill is part of the solution—but it cannot stand apart from a comprehensive approach. We must prevent homelessness by investing in rental assistance, eviction prevention, and diversion programs so people never end up on the streets in the first place. We must respond with care and urgency, ensuring that outreach teams, mental health professionals, and crisis services—not law enforcement—are available to engage with people in need. And most critically, we must house people quickly and effectively, expanding deeply affordable and supportive housing, ensuring no one is left out in the cold.

Members of the Housing Committee, the cost of inaction is not just moral—it is financial. It costs Connecticut \$3,300 per day to hospitalize someone experiencing homelessness; \$1,600 per day for an emergency room visit; and \$282 per day for incarceration. Meanwhile, providing a rental assistance subsidy and supportive case management is only \$62 a day. When we criminalize homelessness rather than invest in housing and services, we are not just harming people—we are throwing taxpayer dollars into a revolving door of emergency response, policing, and hospital care that does nothing to solve the problem. Housing is not just the humane solution—it is the fiscally responsible one.

What we cannot do is criminalize people for existing without shelter. As Justice Sonia Sotomayor stated in her dissenting opinion in *City of Grants Pass v. Johnson*, “*Sleep is a biological necessity, not a crime. For some people, sleeping outside is their only option.*” When we punish people for the condition of homelessness rather than addressing the root causes, we are not solving the problem—we are perpetuating it. The legal system is increasingly recognizing that punishing someone for what they cannot control violates fundamental constitutional rights.

*Raised Bill No. 7033* gives us the opportunity to align our policies with our values. It allows us to stop being passive witnesses and start being active participants in real solutions. This bill does not take away municipal control. It does not prevent cities from managing public spaces. Instead, it offers a practical, evidence-based framework for ensuring that no person is punished for simply trying to survive when they have nowhere else to go. It encourages municipalities to invest in real solutions—housing, public restrooms, mobile outreach teams—instead of criminalization. It stops the costly, ineffective cycle of pushing people from streets to jails to hospitals and back again. When 1 in 4 people seeking warmth is turned away, we cannot pretend there is a meaningful “choice” between shelter and the streets. When people are dying in one of the wealthiest states in the country, we cannot pretend the status quo is working.

Connecticut has led before. We made tremendous strides to decrease homelessness amongst chronic veteran homelessness and veterans. We pioneered Coordinated Access Networks. We implemented solutions that work. Now, we have the chance to lead again. But leadership requires more than acknowledging the problem—it requires action. Bystanders watch; leaders step in. We must step in.

I urge this committee to support *Raised Bill No. 7033* as a step toward a more just, compassionate, and effective response to homelessness. Together, we can build a Connecticut where no one dies in the cold, where no one is arrested for existing, and where every person has a chance to find that open door and live with dignity.

Thank you for your time and leadership.

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