



NASW

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TESTIMONY SUPPORTING SB 875: AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF
HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION

Committee on Housing

Written by: Melissa Keilty, BSW, MSW Candidate

Dear Honorable Chairpersons McGee and Lopes, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella, Vice Chairs Smith and Anwar, and all other Members of the Connecticut General Assembly Committee on Housing:

My name is Melissa Keilty. I am a resident of Bethlehem and a current Master of Social Work Student at UConn School of Social Work with a concentration in Policy Practice. I am a member of the Education and Legislative Action Network at the National Association of Social Workers Connecticut Chapter. I am submitting testimony on behalf of our chapter which represents over 2,300 members in the state of Connecticut. We call upon the Housing Committee to support *SB 875: AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION*.

As social workers, our profession's Code of Ethics calls upon us to promote social change on behalf of marginalized populations. Promotion of social change includes challenging institutional policies and procedures which demote dignified access to basic human needs. Social workers seek to enhance client opportunities to address their own needs, recognizing the legitimacy of lived experiences within historically inequitable institutions. As such, NASW/CT supports legislation whose missions reside on community-affirmed efforts to improve sustainable reentry programs.

The relationship between incarceration and homelessness is anecdotally well-known, but not quantitatively well-understood. The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness published a study matching data from the 450,000 people who have been admitted to the Connecticut Department of Corrections and the 17,226 people who used a shelter in their network between 2016 and 2019¹. The principle of this study was to understand how many people experienced homelessness before incarceration versus how many experienced homelessness after release – underscoring both the harms of criminalizing homelessness and the destabilizing effects of incarceration. Their findings conclude that

¹ Prison Policy Initiative. (2021). The revolving door between homeless shelters and prisons in Connecticut. Retrieved from <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/02/10/homelessness/>

half of the people who used homeless shelters were formerly incarcerated, and one in five who utilized homeless shelters had been released from prison within the past three years. Moreover, the findings illustrate the importance of prioritizing stable housing in the state's public safety agenda.

This legislation comprises of policy proposals which demonstrate increased institutional accountability for consequences of incarceration. Such proposals address gaps in administrative housing assessments, decarceration efforts, and reentry services. Section 1 will implement screening for housing risks by the DOC Commissioner and the Director of Court Support Services Division. Both entities will utilize standardized assessments with inclusive social-contextual factors such as prior housing history, experience maintaining a household, and family supports². Identifying contextual factors supports a holistic view of risk versus protective factors and provides avenues for nonprofit entities to provide culturally-appropriate services.

Support for this legislation is an optimal action to ensure that incarcerated persons are considered humans with history, dignity, and a right to housing regardless of their experience in the carceral system. Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any resident, especially those citizens previously held within the Connecticut Department of Corrections.

In closing, NASW-CT urges the committee to vote in favor of SB 875: AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION.

² AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, § 1 (2021).