

Talking Points

Housing Committee Hearing

S.B. 875, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION.

Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, Ranking Members Polletta and Cicarella , and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on S.B. 875, An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for Those Released from the Department of Correction.

I am a social work intern currently enrolled in the MSW program at Southern Connecticut State University. As an intern I am out in the community at food pantries in New Haven and have spoken with many people who visit the pantries. Through these conversations I have heard their stories about struggling in the community after being released from a correctional setting.

There is an undeniable revolving door between homelessness and prisons, but incarceration is also growing the ranks of homelessness. Nearly 1,200 people who utilize shelters have also been released from a Department of Correction facility within the last three years. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, shelters have not been open and available as in years past. Also, due to the lack of shelters and temporary housing situations, individuals are resorting to sleeping in bank ATM vestibules, in alleyways and burning small fires to stay warm, church entryways, and bus stops. As such, contact with law enforcement has increased and while many are being referred to warming shelters, if they are open, some are having negative contacts with law enforcement depending on substance use or possible presence of mental illness.

Many individuals began their involvement with the Department of Correction as adolescents and have been cycling between homelessness and incarceration for decades, often for multiple repeated short stays for relatively minor charges. If individuals who are incarcerated suffer with mental illness, this can also result in individuals remaining incarcerated for a longer period of time and most certainly repeatedly being incarcerated due to a lack of supports in the community.

For people who are under parole or probation supervision, homelessness can make it difficult to comply with the terms of supervision, leading to technical violations and/or revocations of parole or probation and more time spent in prison. Homelessness also makes it more difficult to get assistance for food, housing, and employment and to improve or maintain physical and mental health. While many who are homeless visit food pantries and soup kitchens, they are limited to the foods that they can eat in that environment which circles back to the difficulty of improving or maintaining physical health.

Proposed Policy

Screen all individuals who are incarcerated for housing needs and homelessness risk as part of the Department of Corrections reentry plan to provide early identification of people who are likely to have challenges identifying a suitable home plan or sponsor.

Create and fund a new program within the Department of Corrections to contract with community-based non-profit organizations to provide housing search and navigation, housing application assistance, and short-term rental assistance for people eligible for release from Department of Corrections, but who lack stable housing or a sponsor.

Ensure that the Department of Corrections is held accountable for addressing housing needs among individuals who are incarcerated and are eligible for release and ensuring that the timely release of individuals is not hindered by the lack of housing options.

The individuals I have talked with have indicated that many barriers exist to being able to have a stable housing situation. A lack of an address, telephone, access to the internet and no transportation causes many to stay where they are and remain homeless. Even trying to get temporary housing, by utilizing 2-1-1 has been a challenge to say the least. Many are unable to reach a human being, do not get return calls and feel that once again, the system is putting up more barriers than it is removing. As we work within the community, we are trying to refer individuals for services and assistance, but when all they encounter are barriers and resistance, it undermines what we are trying to do.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. We urge you to support the proposed legislation and to help ensure that those returning home to our communities from incarceration have the supports needed to transition to housing, stability, and hope.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and thank you for your support to efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Janet Moran

Janet Moran

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