

Public Health Committee Monday, March 29, 2021

Written testimony in regards to H.B. No 6666 An Act Concerning The Department Of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Various Revisions To The Public Health Statutes

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals, Pastor, First Congregational Church, New London

Senator Abrams, Representative Steinberg, Senator Anwar, Senator Kushner, Representative Gilcrest, and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

Thank you for considering my testimony in support of Sec. 70 Section 7-36 of H.B. No 6666 An Act Concerning the Department of Public Health's Recommendations Regarding Various Revisions to the Public Health Statutes. My name is Sara Ofner-Seals and I work in New London am a resident of Norwich, CT. This testimony is submitted on behalf of First Congregational Church, New London. At our church, located in downtown New London, we serve many individuals experiencing homelessness and understand first-hand how difficult it can be for people to access resources and services.

The revisions in Sec. 70 Section 7-36 will allow youth aged 15-24 experiencing homelessness, as verified by their school or a provider, to obtain a copy of their birth certificate and a state ID for free. The revision also specifies a definition of homelessness consistent with the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act.

Currently, state law allows a fee waiver for individuals who are residents of a homeless shelter or other facility for homeless persons (CGS sec. 1-1h). However, many youth experiencing homelessness do not stay in a shelter. In my experience, homeless youth often couch surf and stay with friends and family, which does not allow them access to the kinds of services that can be found through local shelters and other facilities. Accessing a State ID Card is critical for youth experiencing homelessness. Without an ID, youth have difficulty accessing services such as employment, housing and benefits.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for your continued support in ensuring instances of youth homelessness in CT is rare, brief, and one-time.

Sincerely,

Rev. Sara Ofner-Seals
Co-Pastor
First Congregational Church, New London
sofner@gmail.com