

Planning and Development Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5174

AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY SHELTER UNITS FOR PERSONS
EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS LOCATED ON REAL PROPERTY OWNED

Title: BY RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS.

Vote Date: 3/22/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/21/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill repeals and substitutes Section 8-1a of the general statutes to allow for the installation and maintenance of temporary shelter units on property owned by religious organizations as of right, with certain regulations and restrictions imposed by municipalities. These temporary shelter units must meet structural and safety requirements, including limitations on size and occupancy duration. Municipalities failing to comply with the outlined regulations as of July 1, 2025 would render existing noncompliant regulations void, with restrictions on additional standards beyond those outlined in the bill.

LCO 3157: Substitute language added a definition of "municipality," added a definition for "refugee," expanded the allowable use of temporary shelter units for refugees in addition to person experiencing homelessness, imposed municipal population cap of 15,000 for applicability of the provisions of the bill, specified that temporary shelter units must be an accessory use to a house of religious worship, specifically exempted cemetery property from the provisions of the bill, and clarified that nothing in the bill would restrict a religious organization from using any existing structure owned by such organization to provide temporary shelter for person experiencing homelessness or refugees.

Amendment A: Changed population threshold from 15,000 to 25,000.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Director of Programs, Friendship Service Center, Melanie Alvarez](#) feels that there is a critical need for such accommodations due to the increasing homelessness rates in the state, citing challenges in finding ADA-appropriate facilities and navigating zoning regulations. Alvarez feels that the approval of the bill is crucial to alleviate homelessness, reduce risks associated with homeless encampments, and ease the burden of emergency services.

[Brano, Belinda](#) wrote that she supports the bill because churches have the capacity and willingness to provide assistance during overcrowding or unfavorable conditions at emergency shelters.

[Thomas Broderick](#) states that the escalating homelessness crisis in the state demands a comprehensive approach and this bill offers a meaningful step forward by leveraging available resources within religious organizations to provide temporary shelter to those in need.

[Cantu, Emma](#) writes that she supports the bill because it would enable religious organizations to establish temporary housing for unhoused individuals, thereby expanding shelter availability and addressing the pressing need for after-accommodations. Cantu believes that passing this bill is crucial for providing dignity and safety to those experiencing homelessness, particularly in light of the significant housing crisis and health risks by unsheltered individuals in the state.

[Rossette Neighborhood Village, Shannon Carter](#) writes in support of the bill stating that it addresses the critical need for innovative shelter solutions amidst Connecticut's housing crisis, offering safe alternatives for those experiencing homelessness. Carter believes the bill promotes dignity, community, and autonomy for residents like those at the Rosette Neighborhood Village.

[Research and Policy Associate, Connecticut Voices for Children, Carmen Clarkin](#) writes that they support this bill because it acknowledges the urgent need for temporary shelter solutions amid a growing homelessness crisis exacerbated by the lack of affordable housing. They advocate for this bill as a step towards providing immediate relief by allowing religious organizations to offer temporary shelter, though they stress the importance of addressing the broader systemic issue and investing in long-term solutions to prevent homelessness in the first place.

[Chris D Antonio](#) states that the bill is a significant policy to empower religious organizations to assist the vulnerable society, although, they acknowledge it as an interim measure to advocate for a holistic approach like "Housing First".

[CEO, CT Coalition to End Homelessness, Sarah Fox](#) writes that they support this bill because it would enable religious organizations to provide temporary housing for unhoused individuals, Fox believes that passing the bill is crucial for providing dignity and safety to those experiencing homelessness.

[Riley Getchell](#) believes that the bill would enable religious organizations in the state to establish temporary housing for unhoused individuals, addressing the pressing need for

shelter expansion amidst a significant housing crisis in the state. Riley emphasizes the bill's potential to provide safer and more dignified shelter options for the unhoused population, mitigating risks associated with makeshift settlements and easing the burden on public emergency resources.

[Policy Director, Partnership for Strong Communities, Sean Ghio](#) supports the bill as Ghio feels it emphasizes the urgent need for immediate shelter, particularly in winter, and calls for zoning law reforms to enable this solution.

[Resident, Rosette Neighborhood, Suki Godek](#) supports the bill because it reflects their belief in providing alternative housing solutions like the tiny home community they've experienced at Amistad. They see the bill as a step towards addressing the complexities of homelessness by promoting flexible, community-driven approaches similar to what they've found successful in their own lives.

[Executive Director, Desegregate CT, Pete Harrison](#) states the bill enables religious organizations to build temporary shelters, addressing the urgent need for housing for those experiencing homelessness. Additionally, it aligns with their broader goals of advocating for housing reforms and addressing the housing crisis in Connecticut.

[Commander, Avon VFW, Tim Healy](#) is helping sponsor an Afghan family who aided the US forces. Healy writes that they need housing but finding suitable options is difficult. The proposed bill changes would help in the families integration.

[Richard Herbert](#) states that churches and similar organizations should be able to provide assistance to those without shelter in times of need, as immediate aid is crucial in emergency situations where other agencies may not be available, emphasizing the importance of offering help to the most vulnerable, given the unpredictable nature of life's challenges.

[New Britain Ward 2, Board Member of NBRJC, Lori McAdam](#) supports the bill stating it would allow, “ the installation of temporary shelter units for persons experiencing homelessness on real property owned by religious organizations.”

[Madelyn, McElroy](#) writes that she supports the bill because it would enable religious organizations to establish temporary housing for unhoused individuals, thereby expanding shelter availability and addressing the pressed homelessness crisis in the state.

[Resident, Rosette Neighborhood Village, Kathleen McKenzie](#) writes that she had a positive experience at the Amistad House, giving her the opportunity to heal, and wants others to have the same chance.

[Rev Dr, David McIntosh](#) states “Churches who have the resources are obligated by faith to provide for the needs of those less fortunate... this includes providing shelter to the homeless.”

[Yale College Democrats, Paola Millbank](#) states that the bill is crucial for addressing the pressing homelessness crisis in CT by enabling religious organizations to establish temporary shelters, offering much-needed housing, toilets, and showers for unhoused

individuals, thereby enhancing their well-being and dignity. Passage of this bill would provide a safer alternative to makeshift shelters, reducing risks such as exposure to extreme weather conditions and health emergencies, while also relieving strain on public emergency resources.

[Yale College Democrats, Zachary Pan](#) states that because the bill grants religious organizations the authority to establish temporary housing for unhoused individuals, addressing gaps in shelter services and aiding those in need during the housing crisis Pan supports the bill.

[Maia Roothaan](#) Believes that by granting religious institutions the authority to develop such units, the bill aims to mitigate homelessness challenges, enhance access to essential amenities, and alleviate the risks associated with makeshift shelters, ultimately safeguarding the well-being and dignity of vulnerable community members.

[Volunteer, Rosette Neighborhood Village, Colleen Shaddox](#) states that they have done extensive research on poverty and involvement with the Rosette Neighborhood Village Collective, which operates housing arrangements addressing homelessness, providing safety, dignity, and community to individuals in need. They advocate for amendments to ensure gender inclusivity in bathroom facilities and the removal of time limits on housing arrangements, emphasizing the bill's importance in addressing the housing crisis effectively.

[RNV Collective, Caitlin Sorenson](#) writes that they strongly support the bill because it aims to protect housing arrangements like the one operated by the Rosee Neighborhood Village Collective (RNV). As a member of the RNV and a parent, Sorenson states she has seen the positive impact of such initiatives and believes in the importance of helping neighborhoods, especially in times of crisis.

[Yale Democrats, Ada Thiel](#) cites CT's significant homelessness crisis and the rise of homeless individuals, especially among youth. Thiel argues that existing emergency shelters are insufficient and proposes that allowing religious organizations to establish temporary housing units could address this gap.

[Yale Democrats, Katelyn Wang](#) writes that by granting religious institutions the authority to provide shelter this bill offers a practical solution to improve access to housing and essential amenities for those experiencing homelessness.

[Corey Sorenson](#)

[Debra Rich](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Executive Director, CT Council of Small Towns, Betsy Gara](#) states that because the bill bypasses local zoning laws, potentially allowing temporary shelter units to be placed in unsuitable locations owned by religious organizations they oppose. They advocate for collaboration with municipalities to develop appropriate zoning changes.

[Rector, Saint Peters Episcopal Church, Matthew Linderman](#) believes that the bill threatens the ability of faith communities to fulfill their moral obligation to provide immediate aid to the most vulnerable in emergency situations, ultimately denying them their constitutional right to practice their faith and offer assistance to those in need. Linderman feels passing such a bill would exacerbate the housing crisis without offering viable solutions, undermining the collaborative efforts of religious organizations with civic and agency partners to address homelessness effectively.

[Advocacy Manager, CCM, Zachary McKeown](#) writes to oppose the bill due to concerns that it would bypass local zoning and permitting processes, potentially compromising the health, safety, and welfare of residents and communities. McKeown argues that maintaining the integrity of these processes is crucial for municipalities to effectively manage and regulate temporary shelter units while addressing homelessness in collaboration with state and community partners.

[Taxpayer, Shelley Michelson](#) states that due to its infringement on local zoning control, inadequate provisions for shelter units, potential safety hazards, and its ultimatum to nullify non-compliant regulations, which Michelson sees as an overreach and a threat to safety and local governance.

[Co -Founder, CT 169 Strong, Maria Weingarten](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENTS:

[Recovery Coaching, Deirdre Armstrong](#) supports the bill and feels “it is essential for our community ‘ecosystem’ to have housing available for those climbing out of homelessness”.

[Yale College Democrats, Noam Bellin-Schonfield](#) writes that by granting religious institutions the authority to establish shelters, the bill not only enhances access to housing, toilets, and showers but also aligns with successful models implemented in other states.

[Executive Director, River COG, Samuel Gold](#) supports the efforts to provide housing for the unhouse but has concerns about the bill, particularly regarding the eligibility of charitable non-profits, performance standards for lot size, duration of temporary units, and investment of health departments in waste disposal.

[Executive Director, WestCOG, Francis Pickering](#) writes with concerns about how the bill would handle temporary shelter units stating that the bill does not address food preparation and storage facilities, sanitary facilities, utility connections, and solid waste.

Reported by: Bailey McGuigan

Date: 4/4/2024