

# Human Services Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5458

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING HOMELESSNESS.

**Vote Date:** 3/19/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/14/2024

**File No.:**

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Human Services Committee

## **CO-SPONSORS OF BILL:**

Rep. Gary A. Turco

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

Connecticut's homeless population is rising due to factors such as unmet mental health needs, rent increases, and complex health conditions. Given the urgent crisis at hand, Connecticut needs to allocate resources to improve existing programs like the Connecticut Housing Engagement and Support Services (CHESS) program. This program was created to improve housing stability and health outcomes for persons with complex health conditions, who have experienced homelessness, and who have been determined to be likely to benefit from targeted services to improve health and housing stability. The purpose of this bill is to maximize efforts to aid homeless persons. Connecticut has the correct programs in place but needs to invest in the improvement and effectiveness of programs like CHESS.

## **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language changes the CHESS program definition to align with federal approval and moves the October 1, 2024 report date to January 1, 2025.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

**Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), Commissioner, Andrea Barton Reeves;** supports this bill stating DSS welcomes the opportunity to improve the CHESS program and to discuss their plans and progress in consultation with DMHAS and DOH,

independent of the requirements set forth in this bill. It is stated that the Department requests several technical changes to this bill. It is stated that the definition of CHES in section 1(a) should be streamlined to replace language in subdivisions (1), (2), and (3) with: “meeting the criteria set forth in such federal approval.” It is stated that the Department requests the due date for the report in subsection (c) be moved from October 1, 2024 to March 1, 2025 (*This was changed in substitute language*).

**The Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity, Lead AAPI Policy Analyst, Megan Baker;** supports this bill stating support for the bill’s aim to enhance the CHES program. It is stated that this bill aims to streamline administrative processes, ensure timely access to benefits for vulnerable populations, and explore additional Medicaid waiver programs to address crucial social determinants of health. It is stated that a JAMA study found for every 100 homeless adults offered the intervention in a housing program paired with case management the expected benefits over the next year would be 49 fewer hospitalizations, 270 fewer hospital days, and 116 fewer emergency department visits. It is also stated that their support stems from the bill’s comprehensive approach to tackling housing and emphasizing interagency collaboration.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**ACLU Connecticut, Policy Counsel, Jess Zaccagnino;** supports this bill stating CT is stronger and safer when all people have a fair chance of accessing housing. It is stated that people who are formerly incarcerated are ten times more likely to be homeless and rates of homelessness are especially high among people of color and women with criminal records. It is stated that for people reentering their communities after incarceration, being homeless or unstably housed increases the risk of reoffending. It is also stated that CT needs to invest in housing programs and services specifically for people leaving incarceration. It is stated that the state also needs to remove barriers that make it impossible for a person to rejoin their family home at the end of their sentence.

**Community Housing Advocates, CEO, Kara Capone;** supports this bill stating support for the intent to improve the experience for clients and providers participating in CHES while suggesting some key amendments. It is stated that the definition of social determinants of health includes housing. It is also stated that the time allotted to complete a comprehensive report with actionable results be changed from 3 months to 6 months. It is suggested that a Request for Proposals be issued to hire a consultant to carry out this study, create the report, and generate a strategic plan. It is also suggested that the report includes input from program participants and participating agencies and closely examine barriers.

**CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, Senior Public Policy Advisor, Jeff Shaw;** supports this bill stating support for the bill’s effort to improve the experience of clients and providers participating in the CHES program while offering key amendments. It is suggested there be an increase in the time provided to generate a comprehensive report and to hire a consultant via RFP. It is suggested to include in the evaluation process the input of those participating in the CHES program and those who chose not to participate. It is stated that nonprofit providers need “bridge” funding up-front to cover start-up costs.

**Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Senior Public Policy Officer, Chris Senecal;** supports this bill stating the challenge of rising homelessness in CT requires a coordinated

response that addresses the multiple challenges people are facing. It is stated that if we are to prevent and reduce homelessness, the state must lead the effort to provide adequate resources to support people with mental health challenges who might be in danger of becoming homeless. It is stated that the Foundation applauds the legislation's systemic approach to planning, coordinating, and maximizing resources for people experiencing homelessness with complex mental health and addiction service needs.

**Journey Home, Director of Strategy, Sarah Pavone;** supports this bill with suggestions to ensure enough time is allocated to generate a comprehensive report with actionable results. It is suggested that a Request for Proposals be made to hire a consultant to carry out this study to create the report and generate a strategic plan. It is suggested that the report includes input from program participants and participating agencies. It is suggested to make changes to the existing program that might include a higher reimbursement rate; more up-front funding for providers to cover costs before reimbursement; funding or strategic partnerships with healthcare providers; and identifying all applicable Medicaid waiver programs. It is suggested to update the definition of social determinants of health to include housing and coordinate referrals and services between CHES and the Coordinated Access Networks.

**Connecticut Resident, Halle Lisette Pierce;** supports this bill stating support to raise this bill out of Committee and calling a vote in the General Assembly to pass this bill.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None expressed.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF GENERAL COMMENT:**

**Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, Chief Executive Officer, Sarah Fox;** provides general comments on this bill stating the program implementation of CHES has fallen short leading providers to withdraw from the CHES program due to reimbursement difficulties, resource prioritization issues, and a lack of comprehensive case management. It is stated that to enhance CHES's effectiveness the bill should allocate adequate time to provide comprehensive reporting. A suggestion is stated to issue an RFP to hire a consultant for the study and strategic plan development. It is suggested to explore funding or strategic partnerships with healthcare providers and identify applicable Medicaid waiver programs. It is also suggested to update the definition of social determinants of health to include housing.

**Friendship Service Center, Inc., Chief Executive Officer, Caitlin Rose;** provides general comments on this bill stating there have been significant kinks in the CHES program leading it to be unsuccessful in achieving its goals. It is stated that they support the effort to improve the experience for both clients and providers while recommending the bill to ensure the Departments work closely and have time to generate a comprehensive report with actionable results. It is suggested to issue an RFP to hire a consultant to carry out this study and generate a strategic plan. It is also suggested to ensure the plan includes input from program participants as well as programs who chose not to participate.

**Reported by: Carley Van Buiten**

**Date: April 2, 2024**

