



**KEEP THE PROMISE COALITION**  
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**Testimony before the Select Committee on Housing**  
**Re: SB 142 February 26, 2008**

Good morning/afternoon Senator Gomes, Representative Green, and honorable members of the Select Committee on Housing. My name is Cheri Bragg, Keep the Promise Coalition Coordinator, and I am here today to testify in support of HB 142, An Act Increasing the Number of Housing Units in the Next Steps Initiative. I'd like to begin by mentioning that I was honored to be able to participate in the recent Point-in-Time Homeless Count on January 30<sup>th</sup>. Although I participated in Manchester, I am told that there are homeless people living in every single town and city in Connecticut. Absolutely every single town! The fact that this surprised me, even after having worked in social services, speaks to the fact that we all have a picture of what homelessness looks like. Unfortunately, many people think that homelessness, just like mental illness, is somehow "deserved", or that if people just "got a job" or "worked harder", then they could avoid these distasteful circumstances. I am sure that everyone here today knows that reality is far more complicated. Mental illness and homelessness are not desired nor deserved by anyone.

SB 142 asks that the State funds 650 new units of housing. This is the number of units that will begin to address the need and capacity in our State. The need is certainly there. The homeless count confirms this. Years ago, people said that if Supportive Housing was funded that the capacity to build would not be there. In 2006, the first round of funding, 476 units of Supportive Housing, were applied for by builders. 150 units were funded. In 2007, 378 units were applied for, and 168 were funded. The capacity to build is overflowing. People were worried about the "NIMBY" (Not in my Backyard) mentality. Communities are embracing Supportive Housing's proven track record, including the coinciding increase in

neighboring property values.

The final hurdle is the will to fund Supportive Housing at meaningful levels and on an ongoing basis to reach the goal of 10,000 units in 10 years. At first glance people see the cost of funding these units. It is vitally important to keep in mind the cost savings of investing in Supportive Housing which will house both families and individuals, many of whom are challenged by mental illness.

Historically in Connecticut and nationwide, society institutionalized people living with mental illness at a high cost to taxpayers and of course to the individuals and families affected. When Connecticut made the wise decision, following a nationwide trend, to close two of its largest psychiatric institutions, it did not invest in a comprehensive community service system to ensure available community supports and services. Many people slid through their communities and into our state's nursing homes, jails and prisons and into homelessness and revolving emergency room visits. The cost of these "de facto" services to both people receiving services and taxpayers is extremely cost-prohibitive and inadequate. It costs far more NOT to house someone (which often results in costly emergency care) or to "house" someone in nursing homes, prisons, or institutions with insufficient treatment.

Finally, I would like to encourage this committee to participate in their town's Homeless Count next year. Like many people, I struggle with various things that make daily living a challenge. However, I cannot begin to describe the powerful impact of interviewing people who were homeless on a cold winter night and then realizing at the end of that night that I could then choose to go home. Please give other people the chance to go home too. Please fund SB 142. Thank you.