

Testimony Before the Human Services Committee & the Select Committee on Children

Public Hearing, December 18th, 2008

Good Morning, Senator Harris, Senator Meyer, Representative McMahon, Representative Villano, and esteemed members of the Human Services Committee & the Select Committee on Children.

My name is Thomas Burr, and I live in Glastonbury, Connecticut. I am the President of the Manchester Affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Connecticut, aka NAMI—CT. I am also the Parent of an Adult Child who is in Recovery from Bipolar Disorder, after 8 years worth of repeated Hospitalizations, Incarcerations, and Homelessness. Currently he is living on his own; he is working, and doing very well. I mention this only to illustrate that people with Mental Illness can and do recover, and become contributing members to society (as well as Taxpayers!). Also, please be aware that I am speaking today not as a member of any group, but simply as a Tax Payer in the great state of CT, and that I come here today to specifically address the lack of community-based service options for children and families, and for kids who are stuck in inpatient settings or out-of-state placements, as well as to advocate for and ask you and our Governor to allow the housing construction for the third round of Next Steps supportive housing to move forward immediately. To wit:

- The 14 projects that applied for this round of funding are ready to go, that is they are "shovel ready" for construction jobs. Delay will threaten existing site control and financing.
- Construction and/or rehab have a multiplier effect in creating and preserving jobs: that is contractors, sub contractors, purchase of furnishings, etc. that will be spurred by the development.
- The housing construction would provide permanent homes for families, children, veterans and people with disabilities who are experiencing homelessness – i.e. living on the streets or in shelters. Failure to provide the housing will increase state costs of homelessness by **three times**, through increased utilization of Homeless Shelters, Nursing Homes, Emergency Rooms, and Jails & Prisons. **Please note that the costs associated with these CRISIS BASED SERVICES cannot be avoided, nor deferred!**
- The need for permanent supportive housing will only increase with the economic downturn. The vacancy rate in rental housing runs 5% statewide, a very tight rental market, making it even more difficult for people who are homeless to obtain housing.
- The organizations applying to create housing for people who are homeless have invested many months and significant resources in planning, developing community support, fundraising, and submitting detailed applications.

In Connecticut, the average Medicaid reimbursement per Supportive Housing Tenant who previously used high-cost medical inpatient services decreased by 71%! In other words, rather than have people who are leaving our Shelters, Hospitals, Nursing Homes, Jails & Prisons left to fend for themselves out on the streets, they instead enter Supportive Housing, which includes services such as medication monitoring, and job & life counseling. This scenario eliminates the "revolving door" of repeated trips to these **very expensive crisis-based services**.

I can tell you from my own personal experience that there were many times my own son was stuck in a Connecticut Mental Health Hospital; he was well enough to be discharged, but unable to leave because he literally had no place to go!

On the other hand, people with a Mental Illness who have a stable home environment through Supportive Housing will sooner be able to enter Recovery, eventually getting jobs in their community, and therefore providing tax revenue to the State. They transform themselves from being an expensive burden under the current system, and **instead become an asset to the State and to their community**.

IN SUMMARY: "Keep the Promise", and enable people with Mental Illness to become productive members of society. Keep them OUT of our Jails & Prisons, Nursing Homes and Emergency Rooms; increase their chances for Recovery, and ultimately SAVE our Taxpayers Money. It is clear that it would be fiscally irresponsible for the State of Connecticut to not fund this additional Supportive Housing.

I will now gladly answer any questions you have.

Respectfully Submitted,
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