



**Testimony in Support of
S.B. 875
AN ACT CONCERNING THE RISK OF HOMELESSNESS FOR THOSE
RELEASED FROM THE CUSTODY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION**

**March 4, 2021
Housing Committee**

Representative McGee, Senator Lopes, and Distinguished Members of the Housing Committee:

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a non-profit children's rights legal organization, affiliated with the UConn School of Law. The Center provides representation for underserved children in Connecticut's communities, through individual representation, education and training, and systemic advocacy. The Center focuses on representing children in child welfare, immigration, juvenile delinquency, public health, and special education matters.

I submit this testimony in support of Senate Bill No. 875, An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for Those Released from the Custody of the Department of Correction.

This bill proposes an addition to C.G.S. § 12-81z. In its current form, the statute states that the Department of Correction, the Board of Pardons and Paroles, and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, are to develop a risk assessment strategy that accurately reflects an offender's likelihood to recidivate upon release from custody. As important, Bill 875 would add a section to also assess the risk of offenders becoming homeless upon release.

According to a report put out by the Prison Policy Initiative in 2018, formerly incarcerated persons experience homeless at 7 times the rate of the general public, for those incarcerated once, and up to 13 times more than the general public for those who have been incarcerated two or more times.¹ Women, people of color – specifically, Black individuals – and those who have been recently released from prison are typically those with the highest risk of being homeless or housing insecure.² These numbers are

¹ Nowhere to Go: Homelessness among formerly incarcerated people, August 2018, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html#recentlyreleased>

² *Id.*

particularly concerning for young people, as up to 84% of juvenile offenders reoffend within 5 years, and 40% of detained youth, end up in adult prison by the age of 25.³

According to a report just issued in February 2021, the CT Coalition to End Homelessness found that 1 in 5 people who used homeless shelters between January 2016 and January 2019 had been released from prison within the last three years, and nearly 30% of those in shelters had become homeless only *after* their release.⁴

Implementing this statutory change is an important step toward recognizing the needs and dignity of all Connecticut residents. As we've seen time and again at CCA, youth without stable housing often struggle with many other aspects of life, including physical and mental health, substance abuse, securing employment, and high rates of stigma and shame. No one throughout our state should have to contend with these hurdles, especially those who are trying their best to change their behaviors, reintegrate into society, and provide for their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, has shown how important it is to break the cycle of homelessness and incarceration. Rarely has both the need for housing, and the need to keep prison populations low, been shown as plainly as it has over the last year. As this Committee well knows, it is abundantly clear that stable, long-term housing is vital for both the personal health of each individual, and now more than ever, the health of the general public.

Additionally, while helping people get back on their feet is obviously the ethical thing to do, reducing the homeless population, and in turn, the prison population, is a wise financial decision for our state. In 2012, then Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Shaun Donovan, estimated that between costs for shelters, emergency rooms, and jails, it cost tax-payers roughly \$40,000 per year to address the needs of a single person without stable housing.⁵ Additionally, a 2017 study by the RAND Corporation, which evaluated homelessness alleviation programs in Los Angeles County, found that, in the year after receipt of long-term housing, the cost for public services consumed by formerly homeless individuals dropped by 60%. Even after accounting for the costs of permanent supportive housing, savings to the county were about 20%.⁶

Instead of continuing to fund the revolving door between homelessness and incarceration, Connecticut could better serve individuals, our youth, and the state at large, by investing in long-term housing options. But before we can do that, we need to have a law that reflects the necessity of understanding

³ Do We Know the Full Extent of Juvenile Recidivism?, November 1, 2018, <https://info.mstservices.com/blog/juvenile-recidivism-rates>

⁴ New data: The revolving door between homeless shelters and prisons in Connecticut, February 10, 2021, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/02/10/homelessness/>

⁵ <https://www.politifact.com/factchecks/2012/mar/12/shaun-donovan/hud-secretary-says-homeless-person-costs-taxpayers/>

⁶ <https://www.caringworksinc.org/our-impact/community-impact/>;
https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1694.html

the scope of the issue here in Connecticut, as would be determined via an assessment, upon release from prison, of the risk of offenders becoming homeless.

For these reasons, the Center for Children's Advocacy strongly supports the passage of S.B. 875. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allyson Presskreischer", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border.

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