

Housing Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5160 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

Title: AN ACT APPROPRIATING FUNDS TO ASSIST HOMELESS PERSONS.

Vote Date: 3/5/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/17/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Housing Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to allocate \$35,500,000 to the Connecticut Department of Housing from the General Fund to assist homeless persons. The legislature has acknowledged that affordability and cost of living issues have risen over the past decade, and as it continues, there has also been a simultaneous increase in homeless populations. The legislature hopes that this funding will both support homeless individuals directly and provide funding to nonprofit homeless networks to assist in their attempts to prevent and reduce homelessness.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

None Expressed.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

CWCSEO, Werner Oyanadel, Policy Director submitted testimony emphasizing that prevention and diversion is the most cost-effective strategy in addressing homelessness. He states his belief that funding should not be viewed as a substitute for a broad-based expansion of the Rental Assistance Program (RAP). He adds that this investment will reduce inflow into homelessness, shorten lengths of stay in shelters, and improve housing stability for Connecticut's most vulnerable residents.

James Armstrong submitted testimony in support of HB-5160. He noted his experience as someone who was previously homeless, but with public services, was able to find housing

stability. He believes that he is now a homeowner, taxpayer, and voter, and advises that with services, the state can end homelessness.

The Housing Collective, Darius Bailey, Consultant Sgt. Bailey submitted testimony in support of the bill. He notes his experience as a former Staff Sergeant and Team Lead in the United States Air Force and Secret Service Agent, who experienced homelessness after his service. He stated he is trained to assess complex systems, identify threats, and execute solutions under pressure. He adds that Connecticut's response to homelessness is underfunded, overstretched, and in need of reinforcement. Sgt. Bailey added that the \$33.5 million in this bill is a critical start but wants the legislature to increase that amount to \$123.9 million, noting it is an investment that is necessary. He continues by pointing out that 172 children in Fairfield County are currently unhoused, 226 seniors over the age of 62 are unhoused, nearly half of those unhoused are survivors of domestic violence, and 44% live with a serious mental illness. He says that 134 homeless individuals died in Connecticut in 2025 and points out that each death was preventable.

Open Communities Alliance, Hugh Bailey, Policy Director: In his testimony, Hugh points out that the devastating effects of the winter season on homeless individuals, saying it is unacceptable for a state with as many resources as Connecticut to have levels of homelessness that have been the case in recent years. He says that we must spend what is necessary to keep people off the streets and prevent them from becoming homeless in the first place. He notes that the state should also spend more money on housing inspectors through the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) as that will lead to more timely inspections and help people move into their homes quicker. He believes that the state is in an affordability crisis.

The Housing Collective, Angel Bermudez, Program Coordinator submitted testimony noting that the most effective and cost-efficient way to address homelessness is to prevent it before it begins. They note that homelessness can be prevented by helping individuals keep their homes. Angel points out that the funding in this legislation should be increased by \$10 million for a Homeless Crisis Response Fund, which would provide financial assistance to meet a household's immediate needs.

Greater Hartford Gives Foundation, Chris Senecal and Judy McBride submitted testimony in support of the bill, noting the racial disparities in homelessness. They shared that there was a 9.5% increase in homelessness from 2024 to 2025, and demand for housing outpaces available resources, making it necessary for Connecticut to employ prevention and diversion programs, which are most cost-effective in reducing homelessness. They added that they support an additional \$10 million in flexible rapid assistance to keep households stable. They stated that they also support \$31.6 million to bring people indoors during extreme weather, expand staffing capacity, stabilize core homelessness prevention services, and provide case management for permanent supportive housing. They additionally support a \$50 million investment in the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) and \$32.3 million investment in Housing Case management.

Downtown Evening Soup Kitchen, Claudette Kidd, Client Engagement Specialist: submitted testimony advocating for \$12.3 million in extreme weather life-safety funding. In her testimony, she notes that shelters are too full and can turn away individuals from warming centers due to lack of space. She is of the opinion that that the housing crisis amplifies the need for deeply affordable housing to meet the needs of many populations. She notes that

staffing at warming centers presents a major problem and that there would be health consequences for those living outside without a response. She goes on to say that a 24-hour centralized drop-in center should be established, so people aren't living in dangerous conditions.

YWCA Greenwich, Mary Lee Kiernan, President and CEO submitted testimony supporting the legislation, noting that domestic and sexual violence lead to homelessness for women and families. She adds that shelters, in Fairfield County, consistently operate above capacity and she has clients that have prolonged stays at those shelters due to a lack of secure stable housing.

Access Community Action Agency, Emma King, Executive Director

submitted testimony supporting the bill, noting that Connecticut is in a housing crisis. She adds that the \$33.5 million in the legislation is a necessary investment in maintaining and expanding programs to provide immediate relief and long-term stability. She believes that funding in this bill could help mitigate the potential impact of cuts and changes to Housing and Urban Development (HUD) continuum of care projects and bring resources to regions throughout the state that are struggling to address the increase in demand for homeless response services.

Homes with Hope, Rob Lockhart, Director of the Gillespie Center submitted testimony in support of the legislation emphasizing that once a family enters the shelter system, costs increase on that family and on the public. He continues, noting that seniors on fixed incomes are at significant risk and can't keep up. He is of the opinion that preventing homelessness is more cost-effective than managing it after the fact.

CTCIP, Kate Mozzotta, Policy & Research Associate submitted testimony pointing out that formerly incarcerated individuals are more likely to be homeless than the public. She continues, saying that formerly incarcerated parents have a higher prevalence of homelessness. She states that homelessness can be detrimental to a child's cognitive development, education, physical and mental health, and overall safety. She is of the opinion that children experiencing homelessness are less likely to have access to healthcare and may face issues due to inadequate nutrition and access to food. She continues, stating that children who experience homelessness are more likely to be chronically absent and suspended. She notes that children who experience homelessness are twice as likely to be sexually or physically victimized or bullied and are at greater odds of suicidality, substance and alcohol abuse, risky sexual behavior, and poor grades in school. She emphasized that communities typically use police to respond to people living outside, which could lead to public nuisance crimes, which can trap individuals in a homeless-jail cycle.

New London Human Services Network, Jeanne Milstein, Co-Convener

submitted testimony supporting this legislation noting that the rapid rise in cost of housing since 2021 has been a direct contributor to the rise in homelessness. She adds that after the COVID rent moratorium expired, evictions rose to record levels and rents increased dramatically for those housed. Milstein notes that Connecticut's response prioritizes re-housing individuals as quickly as possible, but there is still a shortage in units to house people. She is of the opinion that it is hard to understand why adequate funding for the system has never been solidified within the state's budget.

The Alliance, Monika Nugent, Manager of Public Policy submitted testimony emphasizing that homelessness presents a public health crisis. She says that to preserve life and reduce preventable harm the state must adopt this funding. She believes that this funding is critical to stabilize core services. She adds that nonprofits provide lots of services and this funding would ensure those services are not just protected and stabilized but also makes investments to improve system performance.

Connecticut Legal Services Inc., Raphael Podolsky, Attorney and Policy Advocate submitted testimony supporting the bill but emphasized that this legislation should not be seen as a substitute for a broad-based expansion of the Rental Assistance Program (RAP). He is of the opinion that the solution to homelessness is availability of housing for low-income households, so those households can afford to pay. He adds expanded RAP funding is the single most important part of a coordinated effort to prevent and ultimately end homelessness.

One Standard of Justice, Cindy Prizio, President submitted testimony noting that more than half of Connecticut's unsheltered population are on the Sex Offence Registry. Their status on the registry can alter their ability to get a job and limits their housing options. She believes that stable housing reduces recidivism.

Friendship Service Center, Caitlin Rose, CEO submitted testimony noting the ongoing threat of funding cuts from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that would destabilize 9 thousand Connecticut residents. She advocated for 4 policies but noted they do not yet have a fiscal note. The first policy was for 30% of state funded housing development projects to be set aside for families exiting homelessness, as she notes Connecticut has a 93,000-unit shortfall. She continues to the second policy, which is a codification of McKinney-Vento into state law, she adds that 5,000 children in Connecticut are impacted by that law. The third policy she advocated for was for Extreme Weather Protocols to be enacted when temperatures are either below 37 degrees or above 90 degrees for consecutive hours. The final policy advised to not criminalize homelessness.

CCEH, Ernest Saunders submitted testimony sharing his personal story of being homeless. He stated that he was chronically homeless at the age of 16 when both of his parents died unexpectedly and lived on the streets until the age of 44. He said that when he was able to get a bed at Columbus House, he was given a warm bed, hot shower, laundry services, meals, and a safe place for him to keep his things. He noted that staff at Columbus House helped him get his birth certificate, social security, and a state ID. He also mentioned that he was able to get a job at Dunkin Donuts from a bulletin posted at the Columbus House and was approved for housing assistance in 2016. He added that there are higher costs for managing the issue of homelessness rather than addressing it head on, as it affects hospital write-offs, law enforcement man hours, jail stays, and emergency services.

Anonymous, Anonymous submitted testimony in support of HB-5160. In their testimony, they shared their experience of housing instability and experiencing couch surfing, living in high-crime areas, sexual assault, and paying a disproportionate percentage of their income toward rent. They noted their experience in receiving a housing voucher through the Department of Housing prevented homelessness for them and their child and enabled them to find stable housing, focus on education, professional advancement, and consistency for their family. They additionally noted their experience working at Open Doors Shelter in Norwalk, where families work but may face one unexpected expense, away from eviction.

They said that many households in Fairfield County pay 50-60% of their income toward housing, which is unsustainable. That unsustainability limits access to food, childcare, transportation, healthcare, and savings. They believe that stable housing can positively impact education, the workforce, and mental and physical health. They advise that early intervention is more effective and less costly than emergency shelters.

Anonymous, Anonymous submitted testimony in support of HB-5160. In their testimony, they noted that public services for homeless individuals are crucial to their success. They stated that programs like job training and housing are required for basic human rights, emphasizing how jobs and housing are interconnected. They say that this bill will help keep homeless individuals in their homes and out of the streets.

The following testimonies seek for the bill to be amended from an appropriation of \$33.5 million to \$123.9 million through the Prevent, Respond, House method. They note this added funding is to backfill federal cuts and that without the proper appropriation, there is a risk for housing loss, provider closures, and major system disruptions:

Homes with Hope, Carmen Ayala, Director of Diversion Services
HOPWA, Alyse Bergersen, Program Manager
National Alliance on Mental Illness, Thomas Burr, Public Policy Manager
Alpha Community Services, Sabine Kuzco, Board of Directors
Continuum of Care, John Labieniec, VP Acute and Emergency Services
NAMI Connecticut, Luciano Mastrangeli, Vice Chair
BHcare Inc., Elaine Matt, Housing Coordinator
Liberty Community Services, Jim Pettinelli, Executive Director
NAMI, Bonnie Potocki, Member
Christian Community Action, Fateria Sheats, Landlord Engagement Specialist
Center for Children's Advocacy, Stacey Violante Cote, Deputy Director
Homes with Hope, Katharine Weldy, Senior Director of Supportive Housing
NAMI CT, Dr. Hena Yakooob
Christian Community Action, Charmain Yun, Executive Director

The following testimony expressed general support of the bill:

Connecticut Council of Small Towns, James Beradino, Legislative Director
HBRA of CT, Jim Perras, CEO
CTOTA, Joyce Rioux, Occupational Therapist
Guilford Planning and Zoning, Larry Rizzolo, Commissioner
CT Coalition of Property Owners, John Souza
Stamford Health, Ben Wade, Senior VP of Strategy & Marketing
ACLU CT, Jess Zaccagnino, Policy Counsel

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

The following testimony expressed opposition to state control over planning and zoning decisions:

Anonymous, Anonymous

The following testimony expressed general opposition to the bill:

MCR, Stacey Spooner, Marketing Director

Cynthia Steckler

Anonymous, Anonymous

Anonymous, Anonymous

**Reported by: Michael Flynn
Tyler Fisher**

Date: 3/13/2026