PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

Partnership for Strong Communities promotes equitable change in Connecticut housing policy by coordinating advocacy, advancing research, and uniting diverse partners.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE
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H.B. 7033 – AN ACT PROHIBITING A MUNICIPALITY FROM IMPOSING ANY PENALTY ON HOMELESS PERSONS FOR PERFORMING LIFE-SUSTAINING ACTIVITIES ON PUBLIC LAND.

Representative Felipe, Senator Marx, Representative Scott, Senator Sampson and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of H.B. 7033 – An Act Prohibiting a Municipality from Imposing Any Penalty on Homeless Persons for Performing Life-Sustaining Activities on Public Land**. I am Danielle Hubley, Advocacy & Education Manager at the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are a statewide nonprofit research, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring everyone in Connecticut has a safe, stable home that is affordable to them in an equitable community of their choice.

To resolve homelessness, we need to treat it like a public health crisis and not as a crime.

Connecticut is experiencing a historic rise in the rate of homelessness. Since 2023, the number of people experiencing homelessness has increased 13%[i] , and of those, 44% were children and adults over 55. Over 5,000 people, including 500 children, are currently experiencing homelessness, and of those, 900 are people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, in tents, outdoors, and places not meant for human habitation [ii]. In addition to the risks to health and safety that people experiencing unsheltered homelessness already face, there is now a risk of ticketing, fines, and even arrests, simply for using public space to rest and take shelter. This makes it harder for people experiencing homelessness to overcome existing challenges and does nothing to increase community safety. It's also a far more expensive strategy than providing access to stable housing[iii].

Municipalities should not need to arrest, ticket, or impose fines to address homelessness.

> Nationwide, 73% of mayors say that voters hold them accountable for addressing homelessness in their communities, but only 19% believe they have the means to do so[iv]. Penalizing homelessness strains municipal resources, harms community members, and does nothing to address the cause of homelessness. The good news is that there are proven alternatives based in strong partnerships between state, municipal, and community partners.

To address the housing crisis Connecticut faces, it will take a multifaceted set of investments to ensure our most vulnerable residents are safely and stably housed. When we support the needs of our lowest-income residents, we uplift the standard of living for everyone in our state. By investing in both the homeless crisis response system and affordable housing initiatives, we can move towards long-term solutions that provide stability and support for individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity.

For additional information, the **CT CAN End Homelessness 2025 Legislative Agenda** outlines the **prevent, respond, and house approach** to solving homelessness, through a combination of strong policy solutions and annualized, ongoing funding. Implementing alternatives to ticketing, fines and arrests will ensure that providers and municipalities are working together to prevent and solve homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

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[i] PIT Count, 2021-23
[ii] By Name List
[iii] Housing Not Handcuffs: Ending the Criminalization of Homelessness in U.S. Cities, p.36
[iv] Boston University, 2021 Menin Survey: Mayors and America's Homelessness Crisis