TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING AGENDA
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES
FEBRUARY 24, 2026

HB 5259: AN ACT CONCERNING THE EDUCATION OF HOMELESS CHILDREN AND YOUTH - SUPPORT

Senator Marx, Representative Felipe, ranking members Senator Sampson, Representative Scott, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to this committee. I am Amy Peltier, Coalition and Advocacy Director with 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.

I respectfully request that the committee support HB 5259, An Act Concerning the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. This bill is critical to support some of the most vulnerable children and youth in CT. We appreciate that the Governor's budget includes investments in homelessness prevention, housing stability and education. These investments recognize the urgency of the housing crisis growing across our state, but funding is only part of the solution. There were **over 5,100 homeless K-12 students in Connecticut in the 2024/2025 school year**. These students are guaranteed certain rights and protections under federal law. We urge the Connecticut General Assembly to proactively codify federal McKinney-Vento protections into Connecticut law. The McKinney-Vento Act Homeless Assistance Act, Subtitle VII-B Reauthorized by Title IX, Part A ofthe Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 ensures children and youth who are lacking fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residences receive free, appropriate public education, transportation, and comparable services. 'SEC. 721 '(4) states, "Homeless children and youths should have access to the education and other services that such children and youths need to ensure that such children and youths **have an opportunity to meet the same challenging State academic standards to which all students are held**." These federal protections mandate homeless students' school enrollment is not interrupted, that they stay connected to their schools of origin (with transportation), and that they receive the critical educational and other supports that are most tailored and effective for supporting youth and maintaining essential peer relationships within their school system.

We have already seen federal housing policy fall short. Although recent federal Housing and Urban Development *and* Education for Homeless Children and Youth (EHCY) program Appropriations were held stable, federal rental assistance (Section 8) is underfunded relative to need, executive orders and proposed administrative rules to fair housing protections and plans to transfer oversight of several K-12 programs - including EHCY - to other agencies, including the U.S. Department of Labor will likely have long lasting negative impacts on our most vulnerable residents. These shifts will affect housing stability, affordability and choices and will result in uneven resource distribution. Connecticut must be prepared

to prevent, not just react to, harmful federal policies, intended or not, that are detrimental to our youth and their families.

Youth who grow up without stable housing – often through no fault of their own - experience layered instability through frequent moves, school disruptions, uncertainty about basic needs, and increased stress within the family. Developmentally, these youth are at a time where guidance and coaching play a critical difference between exiting the homeless system to long-term stability or returning to homelessness. Healthy child development practices consistently show that children thrive when they have predictable routines, stable housing, and dependable adults in their lives. These conditions help regulate stress, support healthy brain development, and allow children to focus on learning, building relationships, and developing a sense of safety and self-worth. Even when parents are doing everything they can, the absence of safe, stable and affordable housing can activate chronic stress responses in children, that interfere with attention, emotional regulation, and academic progress.

At a recent Partnership for Strong Communities Intersectional Webinar exploring the intersection of affordable housing and education, **Barbara Duffield, Executive Director, of School House Connection presented on her expertise**. School House Connection is a national organization that addresses homelessness, through prenatal to post-secondary education, by offering strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with youth, families, schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, and service providers. As a leader in this work nationally, School House Connection understands and is predicated upon the foundation that change must be rooted in the experiences of local communities. We found webinar comments from Duffield to be instructive:

- "Housing and education are both necessary for stability and success. When you compare chronic absence or high school graduation data for students experiencing homelessness versus students who are housed but low-income, you see a tremendous difference – between 10 to 13%. At the same time, a high-quality education is necessary to obtain and maintain stable housing."
- "There may not be shelter or housing in every community, but there are public schools in all communities. Educators have their eyes on children and youth day after day, and as such, schools may be more trusted systems for families than other systems."

In short, housing and educational stability are not luxuries for children—they are prerequisites for healthy development and long-term success. I support H.B. 5259 and would encourage lawmakers to codify state protections for the education of homeless children and youth, **ensuring that any bill language closely mirrors the language included in the federal statute (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.)**

Thank you,
Amy Peltier

PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

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