

Connecticut Commission on
Women, Children *and* Seniors



CWCS

**Testimony before the Housing Committee the General Assembly
Submitted by Steven Hernández, Executive Director
Commission on Women, Children and Seniors
February 7, 2017**

**Re: HB 6167, An Act Establishing an Incentive Program for Young Professionals to Remain in the State
HB 6603, An Act Concerning a Study of Certain Tenants of State-Funded Public Housing Projects
HB 5438, An Act Concerning Financial Assistance for the Abatement of Lead-Based Paint**

Senator Slossberg, and Senator Hwang, and Representative Butler, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) on the above referenced bills.

HB 6167, An Act Establishing an Incentive Program for Young Professionals to Remain in the State

CWCS runs a program called Young Women Rising, which is aimed at encouraging leadership among young women ages 18-35 in the political process, workplace and community. As such, we are in tune with reality that Connecticut has been experiencing a “brain drain” for many years. Talented and energetic young people that received their educations in the state are leaving in high numbersⁱ, in large part due to the high cost of living. As the baby boomer generation reaches the age of retirement it is critical that there are younger workers to fill the ranks. CWCS supports measures that would create incentives for young people to remain in Connecticut.

HB 6603, An Act Concerning a Study of Certain Tenants of State-Funded Public Housing Projects

As you know, for decades, older adults and younger persons with disabilities have both resided together in publicly financed housing projects.ⁱⁱ Through our work, we are aware of the robust discussion of both the potential opportunities and problems that can arise from the co-existence of these two tenant groups. For some older adults, the experience of living in close quarters with younger tenants enhances intergenerational connectivity, social supports and quality of life. For others, it can result in lifestyle clashes and fears, including conflicts, disruptive behaviors, and misconceptions about mental illness.ⁱⁱⁱ

All people deserve to live in an environment where they feel safe and can retain choice, independence and dignity. Accordingly, we appreciate the challenges that some people may experience in what is often referred to as a “mixed population” setting. But it is equally important that policy strategies foster notions of shared fate, across age and other demographic

characteristics, especially as the need for affordable housing continues to rise for the population as a whole.

As a result, the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors supports a study of public housing in the state that houses both older adults and younger persons with disabilities. In conducting that study, we urge the relevant state agencies to consider and potentially incorporate the following recommendations into its analysis:

- **Provide additional supports to resident service coordinators.** Resident service coordinators (RSCs) facilitate conflict resolution between residents, establish and maintain relationships with community services providers, and help residents live independently, among other roles. Additional supports for RSCs could include increased funding, oversight and mandatory training.
- **Enhance data collection and analysis.** Strategic planning, policy development and resource allocation require data on both housing availability and need among Connecticut residents. Current efforts should streamline and integrate information on federally-funded, state-funded, and privately funded affordable housing projects and initiatives, stratified by age and other demographic characteristics. As you are aware, in 2004 the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (LPRIC) conducted a study on mixed housing populations. A follow-up to that study, as proposed by House Bill 6603, would be helpful to determine the effectiveness of implemented recommendations, to identify any recommendations not acted upon but still relevant and to evaluate the impact of the changing housing landscape, such as the more recent trend toward developments restricted to age 50 and older.
- **Promote more quality, affordable housing for all residents.** For Connecticut residents age 65 and older, 40% of home owners and 53% of renters spent at least 30% of their household income on housing. Further, the need for affordable housing is pressing across the lifespan, as among all Connecticut residents, 35% of home owners and 50% of renters spent at least 30% of their household income on housing.^{iv} Accordingly, continued annual appropriations to create additional affordable housing in Connecticut are also critical.

HB 5438, An Act Concerning Financial Assistance for the Abatement of Lead-Based Paint

As the Department of Public Health reported in its last appearance before the joint Committees on Children and Public Health (September 12, 2016), lead poisoning in children can lead to attention deficit disorder, developmental delays, learning difficulties, hearing loss, and related damage to the human nervous system and kidneys. Despite a long-standing ban in the state on the use of lead-based paint for residential purposes, lead-based paint has not been eradicated from many older dwellings in Connecticut, and remains a health hazard to our children due to ingestion of lead paint chips, lead contaminated dust, and soil containing lead paint.

CWCS applauds the recent actions to promote lead-based paint abatement through cooperative efforts by the Departments of Public Health and Housing, as well as local health departments. The 2016 enactment of Section 8-291e was a further step in the right direction by providing financial support for abatement through grant and loan funds administered by the Commissioner of Housing. CWCS supports further measures to increase eligibility for the financial supports available under Section 8-291e, if they will result in more quickly eliminating lead-based paint from the homes of low- and moderate-income families, and families having a child suffering from lead-paint poisoning, who are designated as having priority under Section 8-291e.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment today on these bills.

ⁱ Business Council of Fairfield County Foundation , Connecticut Economic Competitiveness Diagnostic, 2016

ⁱⁱ Conn. Gen. Stat. § 8-114d

ⁱⁱⁱ A more extensive analysis of these issues and policy recommendations can be found in a December 2004 report of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, entitled *Mixing Populations in State Elderly/ Disabled Housing Projects*. Available at <
http://www.cga.ct.gov/2004/pridata/Studies/pdf/Housing_Populations_Final_Report.pdf>

^{iv} US Census, 2009-2013 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.