

As Sisters of Mercy, we have worked for decades with the homeless and those at risk of being homeless. We have opened and operated shelters and also have sisters who do direct street ministry. With our vested interest in this issue, we had high hopes for Connecticut to pass the Just Cause bill last legislative session that would have expanded no-fault eviction protection to all renters in our state. Connecticut already protects people with disabilities and those over 62 years old from no-fault evictions—and given that one third of Connecticut’s population are renters this bill would have protected thousands who are at risk of becoming unhoused. Far too many people in our state are already unhoused and we are astonished that this measure is not already in place.

This past Spring the Just Cause bill (House Bill 6990) that would have provided protection from no-fault eviction to thousands of people died when Connecticut’s Speaker of the House Matt Ritter chose not to call it for a vote. Speaker Ritter refused to call the bill to the floor despite 80 votes having been secured and despite the fact that State Senate President Martin Looney had publicly stated he would pass Just Cause if the House sent it over. Speaker Ritter’s decision silenced the voices of the people.

Homelessness is not a crime; it is a critically escalating human rights issue that must be addressed using—as a basis—the recognition of ourselves and others as human beings with rights and responsibilities. We understand that Connecticut’s state legislature must confront the challenge of balancing the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and renters. We implore Speaker Ritter to recognize that the scales are tipping steeply in favor of landlords—this at a time when data and individual testimony clearly define the magnitude and increasing urgency of the crisis of homelessness in our state.

Last year 3,410 individuals in Connecticut experienced homelessness, representing a 13% increase over the preceding year and a third consecutive annual increase.<sup>1</sup> Of the CT unhoused individuals last year, 700 are estimated to be children, and 66% of the state’s unsheltered population were minorities—the majority holding stable jobs and supporting children with

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<sup>1</sup> CT Homeless Management Information System

income insufficient to provide ordinary living conditions.<sup>2</sup> In addition there is an estimated lack of 110,000 housing units to meet today's demands.<sup>3</sup>

Landlords, legislators and renters all have concerns related to the multi-faceted issue of housing. Renters need education regarding their rights and obligations as renters, as well as access to legal services. Legislators appear more concerned that potentially increased litigation brought by tenants could create a climate landlords cannot tolerate instead of being concerned with the housing needs of the unhoused and of those at risk of becoming unhoused.<sup>4</sup> A complex issue with an impact on the concerns of all three groups is the fact that 91% of Connecticut's residential properties are zoned for single family housing despite the demonstrated need for affordable multi-family dwellings.<sup>5</sup> A surfacing area for study are the Catholic elementary schools in Connecticut that closed recently—within the last 8 years. Since the majority are unoccupied, there may be ways to renovate them for multi-family complexes.

Given the complexities within the issue of housing and given the stakes and concerns held by different constituencies therein—we remind Speaker Ritter and Connecticut's House of Representatives that the unifying premise at the center of this issue rests upon and in fact is the dignity of all people. We call upon Speaker Ritter and the House of Representatives to revisit and recenter the cooperative work from all that is required to resolve the housing crisis to the benefit of the unsheltered, remembering they are not criminals.

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<sup>2</sup> Stanford, Levi. Hartford Courant. 6 August 2025.

<sup>3</sup> 2024 Point in time Census

<sup>4</sup> Stanford, Levi. Hartford Courant. 6 August 2025.

<sup>5</sup> Stanford, Levi. Hartford Courant. 6 August 2025.