

## Planning and Development Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-7062

AN ACT CONCERNING TEMPORARY SHELTER UNITS FOR PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS OR REFUGEES AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS LOCATED ON REAL PROPERTY OWNED BY

**Title:** RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS.

**Vote Date:** 3/28/2025

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/10/2025

**File No.:** 722

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Planning and Development Committee.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

The purpose of this bill is to address homelessness and the shortage of affordable housing by increasing opportunities for temporary shelter and permanent housing. It ensures that municipalities with populations of 25,000 or more provide shelters for homeless individuals or refugees on property owned by religious organizations, which are not typically restricted by local zoning laws. The bill also aims to reduce barriers to housing development by preventing unnecessary delays and unreasonable restrictions, while ensuring that housing projects meet necessary safety and health standards. It emphasizes local government compliance with these provisions, urging municipalities to adapt their zoning regulations to support these efforts or face the invalidation of noncompliant regulations. This approach seeks to promote both immediate relief for those experiencing homelessness and long-term solutions for affordable housing.

The Substitute Language provides definitions for the following terms, as of right, municipality, refugee, religious organization, and temporary shelter unit. Additionally, the substitute language defines what entities constitute as a religious organization, and the requirements for providing temporary shelter units.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Michelle Gilman, Commissioner, The Department of Administrative Services \(DAS\)](#): Supports the intent of House Bill 7062 but has concerns about the bill's language and structure. One

issue is the lack of a clear definition of "temporary," as the bill does not specify how long shelter units can remain in place, potentially allowing the structures to be used beyond the intended temporary duration. DAS also recommends changing the requirement for one toilet and one shower for every eight occupants to one per ten occupants, in line with building codes for congregate facilities. Additionally, DAS suggests ensuring that access to these facilities is available 24/7 for residents.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Sarah Fox, Chief Executive Officer, Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness \(CCEH\):](#)

With a significant shortage of affordable housing, rising costs, and increasing homelessness, this bill would enable religious institutions to play a crucial role in providing temporary or permanent housing. Faith communities already support those in need through various services, and this bill would empower them to further assist by offering shelter. It also addresses bureaucratic hurdles that prevent faith-based organizations from responding to emergencies like cold weather. By allowing religious institutions to integrate with the state's Coordinated Access Networks, this bill would improve access to housing and case management services for homeless individuals.

[Carmen N. Clarkin, Research & Policy Associate, Connecticut Voices for Children, and Eli Sabin, Legislative Coordinator, Connecticut Voices for Children:](#)

Have submitted written testimony together. The state's current homelessness crisis, compounded by limited affordable housing, affects families and the economy, with rising eviction rates and more people experiencing homelessness. The bill allows religious organizations to provide shelter and build affordable housing, which is seen as a crucial step in addressing immediate needs. However, CT Voices emphasizes that solving homelessness requires more than just temporary shelter, urging continued investment in long-term solutions to prevent homelessness and increase affordable housing availability. They suggest adding provisions to ensure affordable rent for shelters and propose other measures, like tax credits and zoning reforms, to address the root causes of homelessness.

[Therese Eke, All In for Milford:](#) This statement supports allowing faith communities to use their properties to temporarily and permanently house the homeless, especially when government options are insufficient. It highlights that many faith organizations are already helping vulnerable individuals by providing shelter and food. The speaker believes these efforts should be supported, not obstructed, and that faith communities willing to help should be allowed to do so, without bypassing safety and code requirements.

[John Guszowski, Relations Officer, The Connecticut Chapter of the American Planning Association \(CCAPA\):](#)

This proposal mandates that municipalities with 25,000 or more residents make zoning provisions for temporary housing units on religious institution grounds to shelter homeless and refugee populations. It also allows for the construction of affordable housing on non-cemetery religious property in all municipalities, if the housing complies with public health, fire, and building codes. The bill aims to address Connecticut's documented shortage of homeless, refugee, and affordable housing by enabling religious institutions to expand their services beyond food assistance to include shelter and housing. He argues that zoning regulations should not hinder these efforts if health and safety standards are met.

[David Horst, Outreach Worker, NL Homelessness Hospitality Center](#): New London County is experiencing a rise in homelessness, with limited emergency shelter and low-income housing available. Given that the affordable housing crisis will take years to resolve, providing temporary shelter and low-income housing is crucial for the safety and health of the unsheltered. Religious organizations with the necessary resources can help address this gap once the proposed law is passed.

[Kim Bowen](#): The speaker supports H.B. 7062, highlighting the opportunity for religious institutions to demonstrate their commitment to helping the homeless and refugees. They suggest adding a provision for food preparation in section 1(9) and recommend including guidelines for trash disposal in section 1(11), particularly due to the proximity of the temporary units to private property.

[Bill Bromage](#): He's a community organizer with U-ACT and emphasizing the importance of faith communities in providing safe, transitional housing for the unhoused. He highlights the success of the Rosette Village tiny home community in New Haven, which, despite challenges from the city, has provided secure housing for unhoused individuals. He argues that H.B. 7062 can help remove regulatory barriers, allowing faith communities to play a larger role in addressing homelessness. He stresses the importance of local control and adapting state building and zoning codes to support safe, dignified housing for more people in Connecticut.

[Margaret LeFever](#): "I am a part of the housing research team for Congregations Organized for a New CT (CONNECT). CONNECT encompasses 36 member congregations representing 30,000 people in New Haven & Fairfield counties. Lack of affordable housing is a major concern within our congregations. Many have to make choices between buying food and paying the rent."

[Sara Locke](#): She notes that it strikes a good balance between faith-based organizations, their neighbors, and municipalities. They emphasize that providing safe shelter for those in need aligns with the core belief of caring for others, as held by many faith-based organizations.

[Sean McCreight, Rosette Village and NH UACT](#): He emphasizes the deep sense of powerlessness and fear that comes with homelessness. He believes that allowing faith organizations to provide shelter, such as with cost-effective, manufactured tiny homes, is a necessary step to address Connecticut's housing crisis. He highlights the success of the Rosette Neighborhood Village project, which provided affordable housing for the homeless, and argue that while safety is important, the manufactured homes are safe and meet engineering standards. He urges the legislature to act swiftly and not let bureaucracy prevent vulnerable people from being housed.

[Jacqueline Paige](#): The speaker, a 30-year Connecticut resident and member of First Church Congregational in Fairfield and CONNECT, supports HB7062. CONNECT, representing 36 congregations in New Haven and Fairfield counties, recognizes the housing shortage and its personal impact. She highlights how the bill would help transform underutilized church properties into affordable housing, providing stability for families, seniors, and young people while revitalizing their missions.

Joseph Petrini, Good Neighbors Community Fund: The speaker, a retired VA hospital worker and volunteer at the Rosette Neighborhood Village, supports HB7062. He's been involved in fundraising and building the village, which consists of six modular shelters with basic amenities. He highlights the impact of high rental costs in Connecticut and New Haven, making housing unaffordable for many. He commends the bill for helping residents at the Rosette village rebuild their lives, find work, and secure permanent housing.

Rabbi Ari Rosenberg, Executive Director of Danbury's Association of Religious Communities (ARC): ARC operates the region's only 24/7 homeless shelter, but it is struggling with limited resources. The region's homeless population has grown, and federal support has decreased. ARC's 40-bed shelter is insufficient to meet the needs of the 100 homeless individuals in the area. He emphasizes the importance of religious organizations fulfilling their mission to care for the needy, while maintaining the separation of church and state.

Colleen Shaddox: She's a long-time volunteer at Rosette Neighborhood Village in New Haven, supports HB 7062 and emphasizes its importance in addressing homelessness in Connecticut. They highlight the growing homelessness crisis, with over 2,200 unsheltered individuals, and the urgent need for more emergency shelter. The Rosette Village, which consists of affordable, modular shelters, was built with volunteer labor and minimal cost. It provides privacy, security, and dignity, allowing residents to rebuild their lives. The author stresses the benefits of tiny homes, noting their affordability, safety features, and success in helping residents transition to permanent housing. They also explain that local support is critical, as evidenced by the positive response from the New Haven community. The bill's requirement for religious organizations to host such developments aligns with their religious obligations to help the poor and oppressed. The author believes this model can be replicated across Connecticut, providing a dignified and cost-effective solution to homelessness.

Debra Tangarone, Co-chair, Spring Glen Church: The Housing Research Team of Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (CONNECT), representing 36 congregations across New Haven and Fairfield counties, supports HB 7062. They highlight the widespread housing challenges their members face, including tough decisions between food and rent. After internal discussions and consultations with experts, they advocate for allowing affordable housing developments on religious property. The bill would help faith communities transform underutilized land into affordable housing, providing stability for families and revitalizing their missions.

Michael Vaz, Executive Director, Thames River Community Service: Drawing from his work at Thames River Community Service, he highlights the urgent need for more emergency shelter options, particularly for young adults experiencing homelessness. He emphasizes that a safe, stable place to stay is crucial for rebuilding lives, offering not just shelter but dignity, hope, and a sense of belonging. He believes that faith-based shelters, which often provide additional services like meals, counseling, and job readiness, play a vital role in helping individuals transition to stable housing and self-sufficiency.

The following individuals have submitted written testimony in support of this bill that includes charts and graphs:

Mark Colville

## NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

[Jerry Cincotta](#): He expresses concerns and raised several questions about the bill's impact. He questions whether the proposal removes local control of planning and zoning, whether houses of worship are equipped to provide shelter, and if the state should be focusing more on proactive solutions to homelessness. He also wonders if the bill is more about addressing homelessness or migrants and whether the unintended consequences for both churches and their communities have been considered. He argues that the bill treats property owners unequally and does not provide a humane or feasible solution for housing migrants and the homeless, suggesting it should not move forward.

[Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns](#): Despite its good intentions to address homelessness, the bill's proposal to allow up to eight temporary shelter units on religious property without local zoning approval could undermine municipalities' ability to manage land use and zoning effectively. Local regulations consider factors like safety, traffic, and environmental concerns, which could be overlooked. The bill also raises confusion about building code compliance, as temporary shelters might not meet safety standards and may be installed without necessary permits. COST suggests that lawmakers work with municipalities to find better solutions for addressing homelessness while maintaining local control over land use.

[Stephen Garst, Stamford Neighborhoods Coalition](#): Key concerns include risks to public health and safety, such as sanitation issues and fire hazards, due to the lack of essential infrastructure. Additionally, the absence of local oversight could lead to substandard housing conditions, exploitation, and overcrowding. The proposal would strain municipal services and bypass community input on land use decisions. They suggest better alternatives, including maintaining local zoning review and partnering with reputable housing organizations to provide proper transitional housing.

[Sean Ghio, Policy Director, Partnerships for Strong Communities](#): Connecticut faces a severe shortage of affordable housing, with a gap of over 92,000 homes for extremely low-income renters. This has contributed to a 13% rise in homelessness, leaving over 5,000 people without stable housing. Faith-based organizations, often with underused space like parking lots, could provide temporary shelter during emergencies, but zoning laws currently hinder this potential solution. The bill proposes allowing temporary shelters on religious properties and encourages partnerships with regional homeless response systems. While not a complete solution to the housing crisis, this bill would offer immediate relief by providing safe places for those in need.

[Zach McKeown, Advocay Manager, The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities \(CCM\)](#): CCM believes this undermines municipalities' ability to regulate the safety, health, and suitability of these structures, such as ensuring sanitary requirements and proper building codes are met. They also have concerns about the vague definition of "temporary," the size of the shelter units, setbacks, and the impact on local water and sewer systems. Additionally, CCM is concerned that the bill could concentrate homeless populations in larger communities, straining their resources. They urge the committee to reject the bill and instead focus on increasing shelter capacity and providing support services.



[Barry Michelson, Stamford Neighborhoods Coalition](#): He argues that such laws infringe on the fundamental rights established in Connecticut's first constitution, the Fundamental Orders of 1638, which emphasized local governance and individual freedoms. He warns that the bill would lead to overcrowding, imbalanced development, and increased strain on resources. The testimony urges lawmakers to reject the bills and focus on broader state issues like reducing taxes, regulations, and utility costs while preserving local control over land use decisions.

[Quentin Pearson](#): "As a lifelong Connecticut resident (69) years! I am dismayed that our legislature is so tone deaf on the issue of maintaining and encouraging our small-town history in Connecticut. One size does not fit all towns! Please factor that fact into your "sledgehammer" approach to zoning!"

[John Tartaglia](#): The CGA is argued to lack authority to regulate land use for temporary shelters on religious property, as it violates the First Amendment and Connecticut's Constitution. He claims that the Home Rule granted by Connecticut's original Fundamental Orders remains intact and has not been limited by subsequent constitutions. The legislation is criticized for undermining local control and being driven by urban interests at the expense of rural and semi-rural towns, which he views as a harmful political and social move.

[Kirk Carr, CT169Strong](#)

[Maria Weingarten, Cofounder, CT169Strong](#)

## **GENERAL COMMENTS:**

[Frank DeFelice](#): While supporting efforts to provide shelter, this response raises concerns that the bill, as written, would offer limited relief because most temporary structures do not meet state building, energy, and fire codes for habitable dwellings. The current code offers some exemptions, but it doesn't address issues like wall thickness, foundations, and insulation. To make the bill effective, the language requiring compliance with state codes should be revised to allow structures built according to guidelines from recognized national organizations, such as the Metal Building Manufacturers Association or the National Association of Home Builders, rather than strictly adhering to state codes.

[Francis Pickering, Executive Director, WestCOG](#): WestCOG expresses concerns about HB 7062's limitations on municipal authority over temporary shelter units. The bill restricts municipalities to a short list of regulatory powers, leaving out important issues such as food preparation, sanitation, utility connections, and solid waste management. For example, the bill does not allow municipalities to require areas for food storage or preparation, sinks or bathtubs for sanitation, or proper utility connections like water and wastewater. Additionally, the bill does not address how waste management would be handled, particularly if many residents are living on a small lot. WestCOG highlights the potential challenges in ensuring basic health and safety needs are met without local oversight.

**Reported by: Austin Adil**

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