

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5235 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING A PLAN AND COORDINATED RESPONSE TO PERSONS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS ON PROPERTY UNDER THE
Title: CONTROL OF THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION.

Vote Date: 3/16/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/2/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To provide a universal standard procedure for how to evict homeless encampments located on DOT property in a manner that is as humane as possible and to codify DOT's practice of a 14 day notice before eviction.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

The substitute language replaces the original bill. While the new language still changes the required time DOT must give before evicting a homeless camp from 72 hours to 14 days. The second part of the language is to develop best practices for a universal procedure in handling all other aspects that come with eviction such as what other services should be involved, what to do with individual's possessions, and where individuals can go once evicted.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Commissioner of Department of Housing (DOH)

The Connecticut Department of Housing (DOH) works to ensure access to quality housing statewide and serves as a central resource for municipalities, advocates, and developers while striving to eliminate homelessness. It collaborates with state agencies through the Interagency Council on Homelessness—established in 2023 and codified in 2025—in which the Department of Transportation (DOT) participates as an ad hoc member. The proposed bill would require DOT, in consultation with the council and stakeholders, to develop a plan for

addressing temporary encampments on state transportation property that prioritizes respectful outreach, emergency shelter assistance, and coordination before removals, with a report due by January 15, 2027.

Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner of CTDOT

The Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT) states that since adopting its internal Homeless Encampment Policy in September 2022, it has sought to relocate individuals experiencing homelessness from CTDOT property in a reasonable, humane, and environmentally responsible manner. The policy provides at least 72 hours' notice prior to site cleanups, safeguards personal property, and connects individuals to services through the Transit Homeless Outreach Program (T-HOP), in partnership with the Departments of Housing (DOH) and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). While multiple weeks' notice is typically provided, timelines may be shortened in operational, infrastructure, or safety emergencies. CTDOT emphasizes its collaborative efforts with state agencies, local officials, and outreach providers to conduct cleanups as humanely and responsibly as possible.

Ronnell Higgins, Commissioner, Dept. of Emergency Services and Public Protection

Mr. Higgins noted that substantial efforts are already underway through the multi-agency Transit Homeless Outreach Program (T-HOP). Partnering with the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), DESPP supports CTDOT's 2022 Homeless Encampment Policy, which promotes humane, coordinated, and environmentally responsible responses to encampments on state transportation property and works through collaboration with the Departments of Housing (DOH) and Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), with flexibility for emergencies.

Nancy Navarretta, Commissioner, Dept. of Mental Health & Addiction Services

The bill would require the Department of Transportation (DOT), in consultation with the Interagency Council on Homelessness and other stakeholders, to develop a plan for addressing temporary encampments on state-owned transportation property, prioritizing respectful outreach, emergency shelter assistance, and coordination before removals, with a report due by January 15, 2027. The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) highlights existing collaboration under DOT's 2022 Homeless Encampment Policy and the Transit Homeless Outreach Program (T-HOP).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Dr. Arelo Cruz, front-line addiction psychiatrist specializing in the unhoused population.

Dr. Cruz highlighted significant inconsistencies in how encampments are identified and cleared, noting that the common 72-hour notice period is inadequate for meaningful outreach, medical stabilization, housing coordination, and behavioral health engagement. She advocates for a more structured, humane, and evidence-based approach to encampment clearances that prioritizes coordination, transparency, health, and safety.

Key Recommendations:

- **Establish a structured, coordinated engagement framework:.**

- **Build flexibility into outreach timelines:**
Prohibit clearings during severe cold weather:
Require confirmed shelter availability before clearing encampments:
Explore humane, evidence-based alternatives:
Strengthen data collection and evaluation:

Billy Bromage, lead organizer, Unhoused Activists Community Team (U-ACT)

U-ACT asserts that evicting people from public land when they have no safe alternative violates human rights and has caused significant harm to unhoused individuals, many of whom lose vital belongings such as survival gear, medication, and identification during sweeps, only to relocate to even less safe conditions. The organization cites a mid-January DOT sweep in the Pond Lily area, where over a half dozen individuals were displaced just before a cold weather emergency and heavy snowfall, without being offered housing, and where boulders were later installed to prevent future sheltering. U-ACT calls for a suspension of evictions from DOT-held land until procedures are established—through collaboration with the interagency council on homelessness—to guarantee housing prior to any sweep.

Dr. Erica Cao

Dr. Cao cited firsthand experiences in New Haven where uncoordinated encampment clearances caused significant harm and disruption to unhoused individuals, including a mother and daughter who struggled to find shelter before a severe winter storm. She emphasized that encampments reflect rising unsheltered homelessness and that current 24–72-hour notice periods are insufficient for meaningful outreach, recommending at least 14 days’ notice to allow for proper housing connections and stabilization. Dr. Cao argued that rapid sweeps merely displace people, disrupt medical and behavioral health care, and worsen instability.

Sarah Fox, MSW, CEO, CT Coalition to End Homelessness

Ms. testified in strong support of H.B. 5235, emphasizing the urgent need for a coordinated, humane approach to encampment responses as homelessness rises sharply across the state. Citing the recent Pond Lily sweep and a fatal encampment clearance in Atlanta as cautionary examples, she underscored how rushed, poorly coordinated actions cause harm, destroy essential belongings, and make it harder for people to secure housing. With Connecticut experiencing a 44% increase in homelessness since 2021 and a 45% rise in unsheltered homelessness in the past year—alongside growing housing insecurity—Fox stressed that current systems are under-resourced.

Carli Gaughf, New Haven Resident

Ms. Gaughf cited firsthand observations of unhoused individuals suffering in extreme weather and emphasizing that encampments reflect rising unsheltered homelessness driven by poverty and inadequate support. She argues that responses to encampments on state-owned property must be coordinated, humane, and aligned with public safety, recommending at least 14 days’ notice before any clearance to allow outreach teams to connect individuals to housing and services. Ms. Fox stressed that the goal is not to allow encampments to remain indefinitely, but to ensure actions are organized, predictable, and connected to pathways toward housing stability.

Matthew Hart, Executive Director, Capitol Region Council of Governments

Mr. Hart acknowledges and supports the significant, humane protocols already in place to address homelessness on transportation property, highlighting CTDOT’s 2022 Homeless

Encampment Policy, which guides relocations in a reasonable and environmentally responsible manner, and the Transit Homeless Outreach Program (T-HOP), an effective interagency collaboration connecting individuals to shelter and behavioral health services. While CRCOG appreciates the intent of H.B. 5235 to formalize a coordinated response, it recommends that any legislative action strengthen and support existing partnerships and policies rather than create redundant or conflicting requirements.

Katie Jennings, Director, CT CAN End Homelessness Campaign

Drawing on ten years of experience at the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, where Ms. Jennings coordinated federal efforts across 19 agencies including the Department of Transportation (DOT), she emphasized that transportation agencies want to be part of the solution to homelessness but often lack consistent protocols, training, or clear jurisdictional coordination. She noted that multiple levels of DOT and third-party operators may control land where encampments exist, making clarity of authority and coordination essential. With unsheltered homelessness rising and no codified statewide timeline for encampment clearances and she recommended at least 14 days' notice to allow for meaningful outreach and housing connections.

Helen McAlinden, President and CEO, Homes with Hope

Ms. McAlinden describes homelessness as both a professional and deeply personal issue, noting the severe cold-related injuries seen each winter among individuals entering emergency shelters and emphasizing the dignity and humanity of those living outdoors. With homelessness rising statewide and shelters operating at or near capacity, more people are seeking refuge on state-owned property, requiring a coordinated, humane response aligned with public health and safety.

Sean McCreight, Unhoused Activist (UACT)

Mr. McCreight contends that people seek refuge on DOT land out of necessity, often because shelters feel unsafe or restrictive, and that unhoused individuals are community members deserving dignity and protection. While H.B. 5235 is seen as a starting point, Mr. McCreight believes it does not go far enough to safeguard the legal rights, privacy, and humanity of those displaced. The testimony calls for deprioritizing encampment clearings unless there is documented, independently reviewed justification; guaranteeing the right to retrieve personal belongings; and ensuring consistent communication and support from trained staff to help connect displaced individuals with alternatives.

Quinn Meehan, Activist, Social Welfare Action Alliance CT

Ms. Meehan, a Bethany resident, UConn MSW student, and representative of the Social Welfare Action Alliance Connecticut Chapter, testified that current responses to unsheltered homelessness on Department of Transportation property are inconsistent, disruptive, and disconnected from housing solutions. Stressing that people sheltering in transportation areas do so out of necessity, not convenience, Ms. Meehan argued that policy should create predictable pathways to housing stability rather than simply displace individuals, ultimately improving safety and reducing repeated human and financial costs.

Monika Nugent, Manager of Public Policy and Advocay, The Alliance

Ms. Nugent emphasized that encampments are a symptom of rising unsheltered homelessness and require a coordinated, humane response aligned with public safety. She noted that current 24–72-hour notice periods for encampment clearances are insufficient for nonprofits to conduct

effective outreach and connect individuals to housing and services, often resulting in further displacement. The Alliance supports requiring the Commissioner of Transportation, in coordination with the Interagency Council on Homelessness, to develop a standardized plan that includes structured outreach, immediate assistance, and clear municipal coordination, viewing the bill as a step toward strengthening the state's homelessness response system and advancing long-term solutions.

Caitlin Rose, CEO, Friendship Service Center Inc.

Ms. Rose expresses support for H.B. 5235, emphasizing that cross-departmental collaboration is a longstanding best practice in effectively addressing homelessness. She notes that the Department of Transportation has been a strong partner in coordinated efforts, particularly around CTfastrak, and highlights the importance of working together to decriminalize homelessness and streamline referrals to housing and services. Ms. Rose cited communities like New Britain as successful examples of local-DOT partnerships addressing encampments.

Loti Wallace, Public Health Researcher

Ms. Wallace argues that rising unsheltered homelessness has led to more encampments on state-owned property, requiring a coordinated and humane response aligned with public safety. The speaker emphasizes that rapid, uncoordinated sweeps merely displace individuals and disrupt care rather than reduce homelessness.

Dr. Linda Dalessio, Mr. Timothy Gallogly, Thomas Durhan,

Expressed support for the bill.

Anonymous 33

The speaker, representing individuals in the Waterbury and Valley area, describes recent efforts to provide food, clothing, hygiene products, and water to dozens of unhoused individuals, highlighting severe gaps in shelter access—especially during winter storms. They recount conversations with people facing long public housing waitlists, living in vehicles, coping with disabilities, and lacking safe places to go during extreme weather. The testimony argues that conducting encampment sweeps without offering adequate housing alternatives is cruel and reflects broader systemic inequality, expressing support for legislation that would limit harassment and better protect vulnerable residents experiencing homelessness.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Anonymous 49

Opposes because it does not address the root cause of affordability in CT.

Reported by: Cindy Panioto

Date: 3/27/26