



Friendship
Service
Center, Inc.
love made visible

How to Keep Moving Forward: Advancing Your Agenda at the State and Local Level

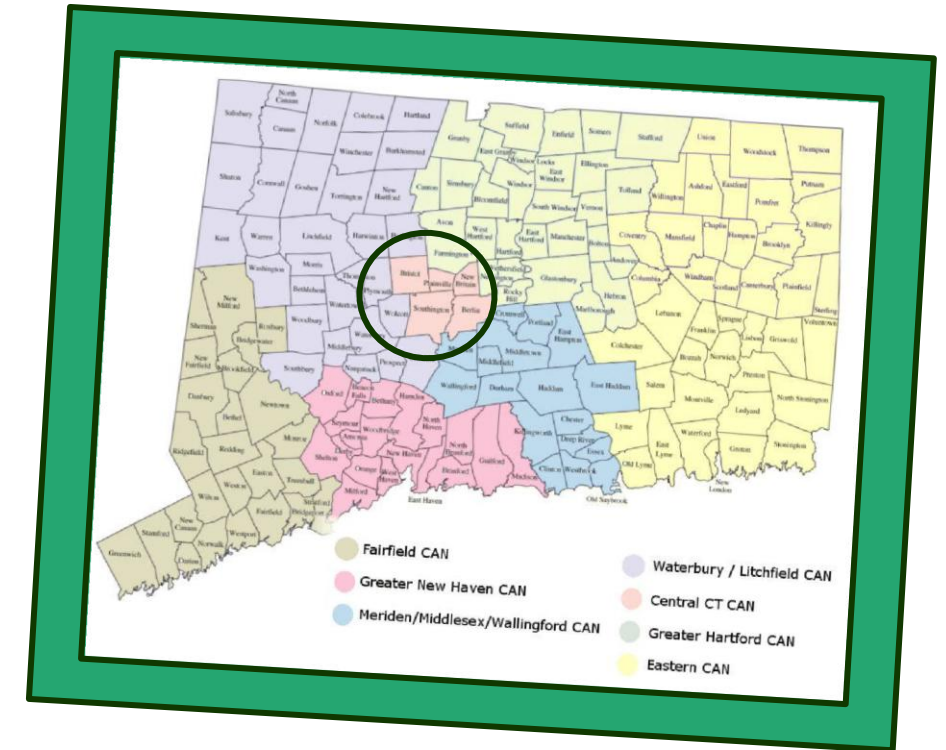
FRIENDSHIP SERVICE CENTER, INC.

WHAT WE DO :

Friendship Service Center, Inc provides a continuum of services to people at-risk of and experiencing homelessness, incorporating best practices and federal expertise with compassion and community collaboration.

WHO WE ARE :

Founded in 1968, FSC provides a continuum of services to people at risk of or experiencing homelessness in Central CT (Southington, New Britain, Bristol, Plainville and Berlin). **In FY25, we have served roughly 1200 unique people from roughly 950 unique households.**



CT Coalition to End Homelessness

OUR VISION:

To prevent and solve homelessness in Connecticut.

OUR MISSION:

Our mission is to catalyze transformative change to solve homelessness in Connecticut by ensuring effective responses to emergency situations and fostering long-term solutions through collaboration with providers, state agencies, and communities.

CCEH serves as the backbone agency of CT CAN End Homelessness, a bold re-envisioning, re-imagining, and re-inventing of our collective approach to preventing and ending homelessness.

The CT CAN End Homelessness Policy & Advocacy Committee coordinates the creation of the legislative agenda for the Homeless Response System in a statewide, community-led process to advocate for policy and funding that will prevent, assist, and house everyone in our state



What is CT CAN End Homelessness:

- A statewide campaign focused on:
 - Raising awareness of the needs of people experiencing homelessness;
 - Advocating for funding needed to address homelessness;
 - Furthering system solutions to better improve coordination of homeless services regionally and statewide;
 - Providing technical assistance, training, and support to member organizations of the campaign;
 - Coordinating action alerts and testimony on legislative bills that support pro-housing policy.
- CT CAN End Homelessness is also a member network that facilitates meetings to bring stakeholders together in pursuit of cross-network solutions.



State Level-Setting:

“A little state with a lot of need”

- **CT has the most constrained housing market in the nation**
 - **51%** of renters spend more than **30%** on rent
 - **29%** of renters spend more than **50%** on rent
 - **63%** of CT households have 1or 2 people in them
 - Median monthly rent has increased **40%** from Jan 2017-March 2025
 - Median home cost has increased **64%** since 2018
 - Housing Inventory has decreased **70%** since 2018
 - CT ranks **49th** in housing permitting per capita (2.4% of permits issued per 10K homes)
 - CT is short roughly **100K** homes across the state for the number of constituents we have

State Level-Setting:

“A little state with a lot of need”

- **CT has disproportionate need to the population size**
 - As of the 2024 Census, there are **3.68M** people living in the state
 - As of June 24, 2025, there are **4,845** households with **5,598** people experiencing homelessness in the state
 - **931** are unsheltered
 - **114** were identified as homeless in the past 7 days
 - As of a 2024 report by the United Way of CT, **39%** of households in the state (**563,512**) earn above the Federal Poverty Level but cannot afford the basic cost of living needed for survival (childcare, transportation, health care, etc)

State Level-Setting:

“A little state with a lot of need”

What's helpful:

- We are not having to convince many people about the housing shortage, or impact of housing costs and rental increases- it is felt personally or by someone known;
 - Housing costs have been rising for a while and it can't continue to be ignored;
 - We have a ton of statistics because studies have been commissioned;

State Level-Setting:

“A little state with a lot of need”

However:

- Just because there is a problem doesn't mean everyone agrees on a solution;
- CT has no County-level government, so 169 towns and cities decide zoning and planning for their fiefdom, and bring in some cases limited perspective to the issue;
- Minimum lot sizes, minimum parking requirements, and zoning for single family homes all existing and long-standing problems;
 - For communities that don't “see” unsheltered homelessness, or appreciate the inflated prices of their home's value, they don't see any incentive to support change

CT Statewide Improvements:



- Majority leadership declared Housing their top priority
 - Omnibus bills put forth in both the House and the Senate
 - Final bill included multi-pronged approaches to address housing shortage; cost of housing; tenant protections; and homeownership.
 - Expands Fair Rent Commissions towns and cities with a population of 15K or more (currently is 25K or more);
 - Bans hostile architecture;
 - Removes minimum parking requirements for residences;
 - Removes certain regulations on pre-fab homes;
 - Allows for by-right development of housing on commercial lots

CT Statewide Improvements:



- End Homelessness Caucus was announced this session
 - Chaired by two legislators from the Housing Committee
 - Championed specific legislation
 - An Interagency Council on Homelessness was created based on a that passed this session
 - Brought in presentations to help educate other legislators
 - Pew Institute, Documentary viewings
- More than 50 pro-housing bills put forth in Housing Committee
 - Far more than in prior years- palpable energy around this issue

CT Statewide Impediments:



- Despite this bill passing in both the House and the Senate, the Governor of CT vetoed it on the final day left for a decision.
- CT's laws would have allowed for the bill to become law even if he hadn't signed it. However, it appears that following this veto that the Governor will call a special session to hash out the more "controversial" parts of the bill
 - We had loud and proud NIMBYs that misrepresented key parts of the bill and scaring constituents
 - Example: The bill "describes how municipalities may receive priority funding if they create a plan for affordable housing" became "towns who do not build affordable housing will be blocked from receiving critical state funding"

CT Statewide Impediments:



- Just Cause eviction did not pass the house and was not put into HB5002- but got farther in garnering support than in years past
 - Sometimes advocacy takes time and the right champions to see it come to pass
- We have a Democratic trifecta
 - Sometimes having a steep majority reduces the perceived need for debate

Some Local Advancements:

- Towns and cities can create their own inroads
 - Hamden created Housing is a Human Right ordinance
 - Sets town for town's intentions to address housing and homelessness
 - Decriminalizes homelessness, creates a community land trust, local zoning review, among other efforts
 - New Haven has staffed and managed a Fair Rent Commission coalition to help support best practices and implementation for towns and cities new to offering FRC's

Engagement Recommendations:

- We are the experts
 - Politicians are just people- feed them language, data, talking points
 - They may want to be pro-housing supporters but have no idea where to start (and a lot of people in their ear)
- Work with other advocates to align messaging when possible
 - Tenants Unions, Co-Ops, similar affiliate groups
- Run candidates and push back on candidates
 - Hold town halls and focus questions on housing and homelessness
 - Be strategic about where and how to push
 - City Council can set the table for local change

Engagement Recommendations:

- Build a bench of support
 - Don't just focus on your Housing Committee members
 - Planning and Zoning has the champions for large-scale change
 - Appropriations holds purse-strings; make friends
 - Be Bi-Partisan
 - Doesn't matter the letter next to their name
 - Don't be afraid of conflict- understanding why a legislator doesn't support something feeds you information on how to better present solutions
 - Be proactive
 - Don't wait for legislators to ask your opinions- get a meeting NOW (off-season) and share information

Data Recommendations:

- Use data and statistics
 - Opinions are really only relevant once you've built credibility
 - As much as you can localize the data, the better
 - Parse out Coordinated Entry data to zip codes if possible to make the info personalized to your legislator
 - There may be outside data sources other than HMIS
 - Look at what other committees your Housing Committee or P&Z members are on to tailor your engagement with them
 - Ex: someone on both Housing and Education committees might benefit from McKinney Vento and family homelessness data

Messaging Recommendations:

- Identify easy wins
 - It's great (and necessary) to have a multi-pronged approach to housing and homelessness, but tracking where there is legislative interest and energy can help you identify where to prioritize
 - Low effort bills that have clear impact are good places to start
- Get the media on your side
 - We have a few fantastic journalists that cover issues of housing and homelessness in CT (and in other states!)- being available to provide comment, or to invite them to cover stories that highlight themes is critical in exposing the larger community to what things look like on the ground, and how they can help

Messaging Recommendations:

- We (homelessness response system) have to change how we discuss housing and homelessness
 - Homeless service providers can end someone's *episode* of homelessness, but we can't end homelessness- that's not our charge
 - Be mindful with how you message
 - Need to be consistent with economics, policy, and inaction being the reason for homelessness to effectively force attention from legislators to step up and create meaningful change
 - Examples: People experiencing homelessness are our neighbors, homelessness is more than the stereotype, is affecting older adults, working families, is a direct result of a housing crisis across the country



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CAITLIN ROSE

FSC's CEO and Representative for
CT CAN End Homelessness

For more information, visit
fsc-ct.org & cceh.org



Be sure to follow **Caitlin
Rose & Connecticut
Coalition to End
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