

Murphy's Supportive Housing Legislation Clears Key Committee

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Chris Murphy's (CT-5) legislation to spur the construction of thousands of new affordable housing units for low income, disabled individuals across the country was approved today by the House Financial Services Committee, setting it up for possible floor action in the fall.

"Across Connecticut, in Torrington and in Meriden, there is a growing need for permanent, affordable, supportive housing. Today's committee vote sent a clear signal that Congress is ready to renew its commitment to the mentally ill and physically disabled who require housing that fits their needs, and we're doing it in a way that uses an innovative approach to leverage existing funds," said Murphy.

Murphy crafted this bipartisan legislation, HR 5772, after he heard from affordable housing experts and mental health professionals in Connecticut about the need for more affordable housing options for people with disabilities that also provide optional services to assist them in living independently. The demand for affordable, supportive housing outweighs the level of funding available - for example, Connecticut's Next Steps Supportive Housing Initiative recently funded several hundred units, but almost 1400 units were left unfunded.

Murphy introduced the bill with Republican Congresswoman Judy Biggert (IL-13) to update a national housing statute often referred to as "section 811", which is the only federal housing program dedicated to helping extremely low income citizens with serious disabilities live independently in a community environment with a support system. Section 811 needs to be updated because the current program is not meeting the increasing demand for supportive housing units.

Murphy's legislation will make several important changes to the 811 program:

- To speed up the process, it allows states greater involvement in the approval of projects;
- Provides incentives for federal supportive housing money to be partnered with state and private money in order to spread federal dollars out to build more supportive housing units;
- Shifts federal funding away from individual vouchers to construction of new supportive housing units, resulting in a potential tripling of annual supportive housing units built with federal support.

Diane Randall, the executive director of the Partnership for Strong Communities in Hartford, testified at the hearing on Murphy's legislation in June about how this bill will help people in Connecticut find affordable, supportive housing that meets their needs.

"Congressman Murphy has worked tirelessly on his legislation to provide more permanent supportive housing units for low income and disabled individuals. We are pleased that Congressman Murphy's legislation was approved today; his work will make a difference here in Connecticut and nationwide," said Randall.

Murphy's legislation is named after the late Frank Melville, a longtime resident of Northwest Connecticut and the first chair of the Melville Charitable Trust, which has been a leading source of funding for supportive housing for more than fifteen years.

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