

House of Representatives Approves Murphy's Supportive Housing Legislation

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - Congressman Chris Murphy's (CT-5) legislation to triple the number of new affordable housing units for low income, disabled individuals across the country was approved today by the House of Representatives. Murphy crafted this bipartisan legislation 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.

"After hearing from housing experts and advocates in Connecticut about the challenges they face in housing those in need, it's clear that we are behind in providing options for those with disabilities. My bill will provide a true path to ensuring thousands of extremely low income, disabled Americans find safe, permanent housing," said Murphy.

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. There are hundreds of thousands of non-elderly disabled households nationwide with what HUD defines as "worst case needs" - meaning they are very low income, pay more than 50% of their income in rent and they live in substandard housing.

"Congressman Murphy deserves a lot of credit for taking the lead in helping improve federal laws for our most vulnerable citizens," said House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank (D-MA).

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.

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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