

**Testimony before the Joint Ways and Means Subcommittee on Capital
Construction Hearing on HB 5005
Submitted by Rev. Dr. Janet L. Parker
Senior Pastor, First Congregational United Church of Christ in Salem
May 8, 2015**

Co-chair Girod, Co-chair Read, and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify:

My name is Janet Parker, and I am the Senior Pastor at First Congregational United Church of Christ here in Salem. I am here to testify in favor of the \$100 million bond request to produce housing for low and moderate income families over the next biennium.

As a local pastor here in Salem, I see the hardships faced every day by low-income and even moderate-income families that are unable to afford good housing in our community. I see families that live on the knife's edge between being housed and unhoused. Divorce, unemployment and domestic abuse are all reasons why working families can sometimes be thrust into homelessness. One of my parishioners is a recently divorced mother who has sole custody of her young son, and who struggles with significant disabilities and mental illness. She recently had to couch surf with her son in unsafe circumstances for a couple of months until she finally got a housing voucher that enabled her to find a home she could afford. She was one of the lucky ones. I also know higher-functioning homeless people who could be responsible tenants if enough affordable housing stock were available along with vouchers or rent-support.

Working with other churches and agencies in the Salem community, my church has helped established an Emergency Warming Shelter in Salem, and our church also supports a homeless shelter for families with children. But emergency homeless shelters are just a bandaid. We need a sustainable solution to the desperate shortage of affordable housing.

The Scriptures that Christians and Jews hold sacred contain this challenge from the prophet Isaiah:

“What is the fast that I choose? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?”

The faith community is not asking the legislators to bring the homeless poor into your own houses. We are asking you to heed the moral imperative to provide sufficient funding for poor and working families to afford their own homes.

Please support the proposed amendment to add \$100 million in funding to create new affordable housing for low and moderate income families. Thank you, and I would be happy to answer questions.