

## **City of Bridgeport: City Council Members Volunteer Homeless Task Force**

Presented by:

City Councilwoman Eneida L. Martinez

## **Purpose of This Packet**

This packet is designed to:

- Equip volunteers and constituents with tools to raise concerns effectively
- Provide clear, actionable solutions the City of Bridgeport can implement
- Reduce stigma surrounding homelessness
- Identify sustainable funding pathways to prevent homelessness and move individuals off the streets

Homelessness is not a failure of individuals—it is a systems-level issue requiring coordinated municipal action.

# **SECTION 1: How to Raise Concern About Homelessness (Effective & Productive Advocacy)**

## **For Volunteers & Residents**

Volunteers should be encouraged to raise concerns constructively, focusing on solutions rather than blame.

### **Recommended Channels**

- Public Comment at City Council meetings
- Written submissions to:
  - City Council Members
  - Office of the Mayor
  - Health & Human Services Committee
- Organized community forums and listening sessions

### **How to Frame Concerns**

- ✓ Focus on public health and safety
- ✓ Emphasize human dignity and housing as stability
- ✓ Use data + lived experience
- ✓ Avoid criminalization language

Sample Advocacy Statement:

“Homelessness in Bridgeport is a public health and housing issue. We are asking the City to invest in prevention, outreach, and housing-first solutions that stabilize individuals and neighborhoods alike.”

## **SECTION 2: How the City of Bridgeport Can Help the Homeless**

### **Immediate Actions**

- Expand street outreach teams (social workers + healthcare partners)
- Create safe, supervised shelter alternatives during extreme weather
- Coordinate with hospitals, probation, and reentry services to prevent discharge into homelessness

### **Short-Term Solutions**

- Increase rapid rehousing programs
- Partner with landlords for master-leased units
- Expand case management access
- Utilize vacant or underused city-owned buildings

### **Long-Term Solutions**

- Support Housing First initiatives
- Increase supportive housing (housing + mental health/substance use services)
- Implement eviction prevention programs
- Strengthen income stabilization and workforce pipelines

## **SECTION 3: Stopping the Stigma of Homelessness**

### **What Doesn't Work**

- Criminalizing homelessness
- Sweeps without placement
- Language that labels people as “vagrants” or “nuisances”

### **What the City Can Do**

- Launch a public education campaign
- Use person-first language in all city communications
- Highlight success stories of rehoused residents
- Require trauma-informed training for city staff and volunteers

### **Language Shift Example:**

- Should not be said: “The homeless problem”
- Should be said: “Residents experiencing homelessness”

# **SECTION 4: How the City Can Raise Funding to Prevent Homelessness**

## **Municipal & External Funding Strategies**

### **1. Federal & State Grants**

- HUD Continuum of Care (CoC)
- Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG)
- ARPA and successor public health funding
- Connecticut Department of Housing grants

### **2. City-Level Funding Tools**

- Dedicated homelessness line item in the city budget
- Reallocation of emergency response costs toward prevention
- Social impact bonds (pay-for-success models)

### **3. Public–Private Partnerships**

- Hospital systems (prevent discharge to street)
- Faith-based organizations
- Local foundations and banks
- University research partnerships

#### **4. Community-Based Fundraising**

- Annual “Housing Stability Fund”
- Corporate sponsorships
- Volunteer-led donation drives
- Matching grant challenges

## **SECTION 5: Volunteer Team Roles & Responsibilities**

### **Volunteer Team Can Assist By**

- Conducting outreach with service providers
- Collecting non-identifying data on needs
- Hosting donation and supply drives
- Educating the public
- Supporting individuals navigating services

Volunteers should not:

- Attempt enforcement
- Promise housing or services
- Act without coordination with city agencies

## **SECTION 6: Measurable Outcomes the City Should Track**

- Number of individuals housed
- Length of time homeless
- Recidivism into homelessness
- Emergency room utilization
- Evictions prevented
- Cost savings vs. emergency response

### **Fiscal Impact**

The establishment of the City of Bridgeport Homelessness Volunteer Advisory and Outreach Team is anticipated to have no immediate fiscal impact on the City budget.

The Volunteer Team will operate in an advisory and supportive capacity, utilizing community volunteers and existing coordination with municipal departments and service providers. No new full-time positions, salaries, or benefits are created by this resolution.

Any future programmatic recommendations or funding proposals arising from the Volunteer Team's advisory work would be subject to separate review, appropriation, and approval by the City Council.

### **Operational Impact**

The Volunteer Team is expected to enhance operational efficiency by:

- Improving communication between residents, service providers, and the City Council
- Identifying unmet needs before they escalate into emergency responses
- Supporting data-informed decision-making and targeted interventions

This coordination may contribute to long-term cost avoidance, including reduced emergency room utilization, police calls, and unsheltered homelessness–related public works expenses.

## **Community and Public Safety Impact**

The resolution is expected to have a positive impact on the community by:

- Supporting humane, trauma-informed responses to homelessness
- Reducing stigma and misinformation
- Improving neighborhood safety through prevention and outreach
- Encouraging constructive civic engagement

Addressing homelessness through advisory, prevention-focused strategies aligns with best practices in public health and municipal governance.

## **Equity and Human Services Impact**

The Volunteer Team promotes equity by:

- Centering dignity and person-first approaches
- Supporting access to housing stability and services
- Amplifying community voices, including those directly impacted by homelessness

This approach advances the City's commitment to fair, inclusive, and compassionate governance.

## **Closing Statement**

Homelessness is solvable when cities choose compassion, coordination, and accountability.

Bridgeport has the opportunity to lead with dignity-focused, fiscally responsible solutions that benefit the entire community.

The proposed resolution represents a low-cost, high impact initiative that strengthens coordination, reduces long-term municipal strain, and promotes safer, healthier neighborhoods.

With the programs available within the city such as the MIRA Program, Family Re-Entry Program, Hearts 4 Hearts, Inc., City Youth Services Bureau, and LifeBridge Community Services. These programs are available to the community on a category basis to individuals that meet the qualifications according to the different standards and needs each individual may have.

With proper headstart opportunities within the community such as schooling, addressing of substance abuse and mental health, re-entry back into the community, and trade/job opportunities. Everyone deserves a chance, the needs of the repeating cycle of homelessness must be addressed in order to prevent homelessness again.

Establishing the Homelessness Volunteer Advisory and Outreach Team provides a structured, accountable framework for community engagement without imposing immediate financial burden on the City of Bridgeport.

## **City of Bridgeport – Volunteer Team on Homelessness**

This guide is intended for volunteers working with the City Council–supported initiatives addressing homelessness in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

### **How Volunteers Can Raise Concerns**

Volunteers should document concerns respectfully and report them through designated city channels. Concerns should focus on safety, unmet needs, barriers to housing, and access to services.

### **Volunteer Advocacy Guidelines**

- Use person-first language
- Avoid criminalizing homelessness
- Center dignity, safety, and public health
- Coordinate with city agencies and service providers

### **How the City Can Help (Volunteer Overview)**

The City can expand outreach, increase access to shelters and supportive housing, and strengthen prevention programs such as eviction diversion and rapid rehousing.

### **Stopping the Stigma**

Volunteers help stop stigma by educating the public, modeling respectful language, and sharing accurate information about homelessness.

### **Volunteer Role Limitations**

Volunteers are not enforcement agents and should not promise housing or services. All actions must be coordinated through approved city partners.

# **City of Bridgeport – Homelessness Response & Policy Packet**

Prepared for the Bridgeport City Council and its designated members to support policy development, funding strategies, and coordinated responses to homelessness.

## **Raising and Addressing Community Concerns**

Constituent concerns regarding homelessness should be addressed through coordinated public health, housing, and human services strategies rather than enforcement-based responses.

## **Municipal Actions to Reduce Homelessness**

- Expand Housing First and supportive housing models
- Increase rapid rehousing capacity
- Utilize vacant or underused municipal properties
- Strengthen eviction prevention and income stabilization programs

## **Reducing Stigma at the Policy Level**

The City should adopt person-first language, invest in public education campaigns, and ensure trauma-informed training for all city-facing staff.

## **Funding Strategies**

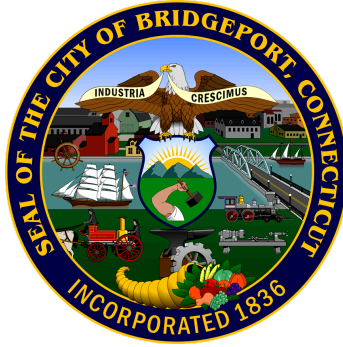
- Federal and state grants (HUD CoC, ESG, CT DOH)
- Dedicated municipal budget allocations
- Public-private partnerships
- Community-based fundraising initiatives

## **Oversight & Accountability**

Council oversight should include data tracking on housing placements, cost savings, and long-term housing stability outcomes.

Prepared for: Our Members of the Bridgeport City Council

Date: December 22, 2025



## CITY OF BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

### Executive Summary & Council Talking Points

#### One-Page Executive Summary

Homelessness in Bridgeport is a solvable issue when addressed through prevention, housing, and coordinated services rather than enforcement. Investments in housing stability reduce emergency response costs, improve public safety, and strengthen neighborhoods.

#### Key Goals

- Reduce unsheltered homelessness
- Prevent evictions and housing loss
- Increase access to supportive housing
- Improve public health and safety outcomes

#### Council Meeting Talking Points

- Homelessness is a systems issue, not an individual failure
- Housing First models reduce long-term costs
- Prevention is more cost-effective than emergency response
- Compassionate policy improves community safety
- Bridgeport can lead with dignity-focused solutions



## CITY OF BRIDGEPORT, CONNECTICUT

### CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION

Resolution No. \_\_\_\_\_

Introduced by: Eneida L. Martinez

Date: December 22, 2025

#### **A RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT HOMELESSNESS VOLUNTEER ADVISORY AND OUTREACH TEAM**

WHEREAS, homelessness within the City of Bridgeport presents ongoing public health, safety, and housing challenges affecting individuals, families, neighborhoods, and municipal resources;

WHEREAS, addressing homelessness requires coordinated, compassionate, and data-informed responses that prioritize housing stability, prevention, and dignity;

WHEREAS, community engagement and volunteer participation play a critical role in identifying needs, reducing stigma, supporting outreach efforts, and informing effective policy solutions;

WHEREAS, the Bridgeport City Council recognizes the importance of collaboration among residents, service providers, municipal departments, and community stakeholders to address homelessness in a comprehensive manner;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF BRIDGEPORT:

1. There is hereby established a City Council–supported Homelessness Volunteer Advisory and Outreach Team.
2. The purpose of the Volunteer Team shall be to:
  - a. Identify and communicate community concerns related to homelessness;
  - b. Support public education and stigma-reduction efforts;
  - c. Conduct non-enforcement, trauma-informed outreach in coordination with approved city partners;
  - d. Provide advisory input to the City Council regarding policies, funding priorities, and program effectiveness.
3. The Volunteer Team shall not engage in law enforcement or code enforcement activities and shall not promise housing or services to any individual.
4. The Volunteer Team shall coordinate with relevant municipal departments and recognized service providers.
5. Membership shall include community volunteers and advisors appointed or recognized by the City Council or its designated committee.
6. The Volunteer Team shall submit periodic findings or recommendations to the City Council as requested.
7. This resolution shall take effect immediately upon adoption.

ADOPTED this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_.

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President, City Council

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City Clerk

