

# Position Statement Regarding Bill No. 050575

The Sansom Street Community Coalition

July 22, 2005

In order to state our position regarding Bill No. 050575, introduced into Philadelphia City Council on June 2, 2005 by Councilwoman Blackwell and subsequently accepted by City Council in amended form on June 15, 2005, the Sansom Street Community Coalition has prepared the following list of concerns. This list of concerns was produced during a community meeting, held July 16, 2005 at the A.I.C.P. Mosque at the corner of Walnut and 45<sup>th</sup> Streets, where local homeowners, landlords, tenants, institutional representatives, and developers discussed the bill.

1. The area surrounding 4508 Chestnut Street is already home to a disproportionately large number of social service facilities.
2. The wording of Bill No. 050575 is sufficiently vague as to allow any form of shelter, with any number of beds, to take up occupancy should the contract with Lutheran Services be terminated for any reason before the lapse of the ten-year lease with the Philadelphia Municipal Authority. Given prior attempts to install a massive intake facility at 4508 Chestnut Street, the community is understandably concerned that the wording of the bill has deliberately been left open.
3. The A.I.C.P. Mosque, West Catholic High School, the playground at 45<sup>th</sup> and Sansom Streets, and West Philadelphia High School all contribute to a heavy concentration of children in the immediate area, whose safety and well-being would be jeopardized by the presence of such a large homeless shelter. The mosque has already reported incidents of strangers from nearby shelters entering their building; it is inevitable that these incidents would increase greatly in frequency were the proposed shelter to be installed. It is only very recently that this

neighborhood has reached the point where children can play safely on the streets, and our greatest fear is that this could be taken away from them.

4. The location of a shelter across from West Catholic High School greatly compromises its ability to compete for students, at a time when it is already experiencing decreasing enrollment.
5. Several buildings are currently undergoing rehabilitation in the immediate area, including a row of five houses directly behind 4508 Chestnut Street, several properties on the 4400 block of Sansom Street, and five buildings on the 4400 block of Chestnut Street. The builders have invested in these renovations in anticipation of a market that will evaporate with the construction of a massive homeless shelter on a neighboring lot. We fear that, under these circumstances, many more properties that have already been acquired for renovation will simply be abandoned by developers forced to mitigate their losses, potentially destabilizing the area. Furthermore, the future of the 4600 block of Sansom Street is, even now, very uncertain. The installation of the proposed homeless facility at 4508 Chestnut Street would virtually guarantee that this block would remain blighted for years to come.
6. Local businesses that have recently moved to the area, including the cafe on the 4400 block of Chestnut Street and Moya on the 100 block of South 44<sup>th</sup> Street, have invested in this community under the assumption that the many properties under renovation will soon be occupied. If this does not happen, these businesses will be unsustainable.
7. Councilwoman Blackwell's office has played a crucial role in restoring this community by supporting the redevelopment of houses in the area, and by sponsoring such projects as the playground at the corner of 45<sup>th</sup> and Sansom Streets and the repaving of the 4400 block of Moravian Street. The proposed facility would undermine the progress made in this restoration. It would also directly contradict the three specific objectives of the 45<sup>th</sup> & Sansom Redevelopment Area Plan released in February of 2002 by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission:
  - (a) to encourage rehabilitation of vacant homes;

- (b) to eliminate the blighting influence of undesirable land uses by encouraging the redevelopment of vacant land and buildings, and underutilized properties; and
  - (c) to replace substandard or economically obsolete buildings with open space or new housing where rehabilitation is impractical.
- 8. We have made great strides over the past few years in building a sense of community here, where neighbors know and trust one another. The addition of several hundred temporary residents with no stake in the neighborhood threatens to destroy this sense of community.
- 9. There are a number of uses for the site at 4508 Chestnut Street that we think would be more appropriate and more sensitive to the needs of the community than the installation of a massive homeless shelter. These include the following:
  - (a) an extension of West Catholic High School;
  - (b) a nursing home, similar to the one operated by Mercy-Douglass prior to 2000;
  - (c) a low-income housing facility for seniors;
  - (d) an extension of the Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College;
  - (e) a charter elementary school; or
  - (f) additional laboratory or office space for the University of Pennsylvania.
- 10. Additionally, we are surprised that Bill No. 050575 was introduced to City Council without any consultation or communication with the surrounding community. It is very apparent that virtually no community member or stakeholder in the area was even notified of this impending legislation or proposed facility; this is despite prior assurances from Councilwoman Blackwell's office that communication on such issues would be open and clear.