

Governor's Proposed Mid-term Budget Adjustments for FY2021
Department of Housing
Tuesday, February 11th, 2020

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Marcia DuFore and I am a registered voter in the town of Suffield, Connecticut. I am testifying as a private citizen, Executive Director on behalf of the Amplify, Inc., and member of the Connecticut Prevention Coalition (CPN) and Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP).

I am testifying to encourage investment in the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Amplify is the Regional Behavioral Health Action Organization charged by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to act as their strategic community partner for planning, education, and advocacy to address behavioral health needs and services for children and adults in North Central Connecticut.

I am including below some observations and recommendations from our 2019 Region IV Priorities and Recommendations Report submitted to DMHAS.

Housing concerns continues to be one of the top priority issues that impact people seeking recovery from behavioral health challenges in our region. People with mental health and addiction issues face housing discrimination and encounter many barriers to accessing stable, permanent housing. According to the Director of Connecticut's Department of Housing (DOH), Steve DiLella, "When we put someone in affordable housing, a lot of things get better." He shared that in a program specifically designed for individuals that cycle between the jail system and the homeless service system, the recidivism is usually 50%, but when placed in housing programs, the rate is only 10% to 13%. Director DiLella asserts, "Housing helps create a stable base for recovery." Nonetheless, people with mental health and addiction issues remain some of the most vulnerable groups in Connecticut.

We must address the gaps in the continuum of care for supportive, supported, and residential housing for individuals with mental health and addiction challenges. Unless these gaps are addressed, individuals will continue to cycle through homelessness, hospitalization and incarceration at great cost to the system and their personal well-being.

Connecticut has made significant progress and leads the nation in its efforts to address the important and expensive problem of homelessness – but we still have far too many individuals, families with young children, and youth becoming homeless daily. We must invest in proven solutions to homelessness to continue our progress.

We ask that you preserve vital housing/homeless resources in the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services line at \$85.8 million, and the Homeless Youth line at \$2.3 million.

We ask you to make the following additional investments in order to help achieve Connecticut's goal of making homelessness rare, brief and one time by 2023:

- Create a stable funding stream for the Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) 2-1-1 by providing \$2.3 million annually to the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services line.
- Invest \$1.47 million in the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services to enhance our state's capacity to quickly resolve episodes of homelessness for individuals and youth requiring shelter using flexible funds for diversion and rapid exit.
- Add \$1 million each for rental assistance and services to provide stable housing and services for highly vulnerable people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Homelessness is a costly problem, in the toll it takes on human lives, and the toll it takes on public resources. We know what works to end homelessness – through coordinated efforts to secure the right housing and supports, we can resolve homelessness – one person, one family at a time. The net gain to those we serve, to our communities, and to our state is clear: it costs more to allow homelessness to persist than it does to resolve it.

Thank you for all you do and for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,
Marcia DuFore
Executive Director
Amplify, Inc.