

257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 | P (860) 721-7876 | www.cceh.org

**Appropriations Budget Hearing
On Governor's proposed Mid-term Budget Adjustments for FY2021
Department of Correction and Judicial Testimony
Tuesday, February 11, 2020**

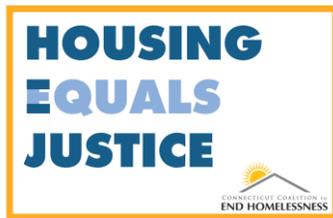
Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for allowing me to testify. My name is Richard Cho and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH). I am here to testify on investments needed within the Department of Correction and Judicial Department to address a major public safety crisis in our state: homelessness and housing stability among people involved in the criminal justice system.

In 2019, following up from the Connecticut General Assembly's Commission on Equity and Opportunity's report, *Hope for Success*, my organization, CCEH, and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) matched administrative data on homeless services with prison and jail data from the Connecticut Department of Correction to determine the extent to which people leaving prisons and jails were falling into homelessness. Through this match, we found that over 3,500 people who used homeless shelters in the last three years were also released from a Department of Correction facility within the last three years. On an annual basis, nearly 1,200 people who slept in a homeless shelter were released from a DOC facility within the last three years. This represents one-fifth (20%) of our state's sheltered homeless population and 12% of people released from prisons and jails.

Not only did this analysis reveal that the overlap between homelessness and people leaving prisons and jails was a much bigger problem than anyone realized, it also led us to better understand the scope of the challenges faced by this population and the degree to which homelessness also creates public safety challenges.

We learned that homeless individuals held in pretrial detention are denied pretrial release because their lack of stable housing is viewed as increasing the risk of failure to appear. Whereas 75% of pretrial detainees in Connecticut are released on bond, only 25% of homeless detainees were released on bond and 75% wound up staying in jail.

We learned that when homeless individuals are sentenced, they are held in prison long beyond their potential release dates. Whereas the Department of Correction's policy has been to review inmates for release at 50% of the completion of their sentences, those who lack a housing destination are denied release and held in prison longer. In fact, 80% of the sentenced inmates who were identified as homeless were released at End-of-Sentence, meaning that they had maxed out their sentences and were released without any form of supervision.



257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 | P (860) 721-7876 | www.cceh.org

We learned that for people released from DOC custody under parole or probation supervision, homelessness decreases their chances of complying with the terms of supervision, leading to technical violations and/or revocations of parole or probation and a revolving door to prison. We found that more than half of the people in the matched analysis had more than 6 prior admission to DOC and multiple episodes of homelessness.

We also learned that many of these individuals have been on this revolving door for decades. Nearly 60% of the people we identified in our analysis had their first contact with DOC prior to the age of 24, while many of them are now in the 40s and 50s. We found high rates of mental health and substance use issues among this population, and multiple failed attempts at treatment.

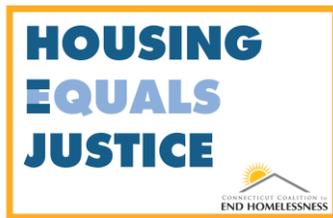
If the numbers and stats don't provide enough of a picture, let me tell you about "Paul," an individual we identified as exemplifying this revolving door. Paul is 37 years old and is a high school graduate. He was first arrested 11 years ago, at the age of 26, and first experienced homelessness a year later after being discharged from DOC. In the past 11 years, Paul was arrested 17 times in 8 different locations. During that time, he called our state's 211 Infoline multiple times and was in multiple homeless shelters. He also has had many stays in hospitals as he has a diagnosis of mental illness and substance use disorder. In April of this year, he was sentenced to an additional two years in DOC for a violation of probation, which means he would be reviewed again for release by DOC in two months. Most likely, he will wind up being held in DOC until he maxes out his full two-year sentence only to be released back out to homelessness.

Again, Paul is just one among 1,200 people in the State of Connecticut, who cycle between prisons and homelessness at public costs, only to have worse outcomes and no public safety benefit for the resources spent. This is not how our criminal justice system is supposed to work. This is not how taxpayer dollars are supposed to be spent.

But there is a better way.

Recognizing that homelessness is a significant barrier to successful probation supervision, leaders at the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch recently began systematically screening and tracking probationers' housing status in order to more consistently help probationers resolve their homelessness. In addition, with a one-time grant from the Department of Housing, CSSD launched a small rapid re-housing pilot to provide housing navigation, case management, and rental assistance in private market rental housing to roughly 15 probationers.

We recently toured this program and met with a participant. Let's call him 'Francis.' Francis shared that he has been previously released on probation 9 times and each time was sent back to prison on a technical violation, likely due to homelessness. He said that this is his last



257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 | P (860) 721-7876 | www.cceh.org

chance to be out of prison on probation. I asked where he would be living if not in the apartment he was in. He answered that he spent the last year living in a friend's car. Now housed, he is able to obtain employment, continue his path towards recovery, and avoid returning to prison.

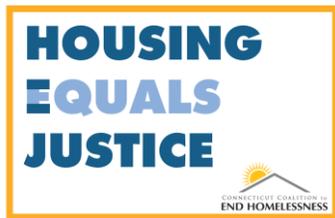
But leaders at CSSD know that there are many more than 15 probationers who need this assistance, but the scale of their rapid re-housing program is limited because CSSD does not have any additional resources to scale this program.

Similarly, leaders at the Department of Correction, recognizing that homelessness among inmates and people released from prison is a major problem, have begun trying to track the number of inmates who are homeless after release. But even as they attempt to track this number, DOC currently has a limited set of tools to address the lack of stable housing. They currently rely on their network of contracted halfway houses. However, halfway houses were not designed to address long-term housing needs and so inmates in halfway houses wind up staying longer than intended and many wind up falling into homelessness after a halfway house stay.

We believe that DOC, like CSSD, should be given the tools and resources, and held accountable, for addressing and preventing homelessness among inmates. Doing so would entail the following:

- Require the Department of Correction to screen all inmates entering DOC custody to assess their housing needs and homelessness risk, including individuals held for at least 48 hours on pretrial detention status and all sentenced inmates.
- Create and fund a new program within the Department of Correction to contract with community-based non-profit organizations to provide housing search and navigation, housing application assistance, and short-term rental assistance for people eligible for release from Department of Correction, but who lack stable housing or a sponsor.
- Appropriate additional funds at Court Support Services Division to scale their rapid re-housing program for probationers, as well as support their effort to screen and track homelessness and housing status among probationers.
- Require OPM to complete an annual match of data between HMIS and DOC data to measure the number of people who exit corrections and experience homelessness (i.e. admission to an emergency shelter bed) within a three-year period.

We urge the Committee to consider making an investment of resources at both the Judicial Branch (CSSD) and the Department of Correction to fund housing navigation, case management, and rental assistance to address homelessness among probationers, parolees, and people released on transitional supervision. We estimate that the average cost of this assistance is \$7,634 per person. Therefore, every \$1 million invested would serve 131 people. A \$3 million investment would serve 393 people. A \$6 million investment would serve 786



257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 | P (860) 721-7876 | www.cceh.org

people. While we recognize that making such investments in a time of budget rescissions is challenging, but please consider how much we are already spending in terms of jail and prison expenditures, probation and parole supervision, and shelters and not achieving results. Moreover, think about people like Paul and his family members

I thank you for taking the time to listen to the information, data, and solutions we've proposed here today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Richard Cho
Chief Executive Officer
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness