



First Congregational Church
NEW LONDON

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

My name is Sara Ofner-Seals, and I am a pastor at First Congregational Church, New London. I also serve as the Volunteer Coordinator and Communications Manager at the New London Homeless Hospitality Center. Through both of these jobs, I work every day with people experiencing homelessness and people who are formerly homeless. I have seen firsthand how important it is to invest in services for people experiencing homelessness, and I have seen firsthand how success is achieved. I have members in my congregation who are formerly homeless, several of whom benefit from permanent supportive housing. One of these members, Catherine, speaks frequently about how supportive housing has saved her life. This is a proven way to ensure that people who end up homeless get housed and remain housed.

New London itself is a great example of how investments in proven solutions to homelessness work. Every day, we have guests moving out of the shelter and into housing. The majority of these individuals we never see again (unless they come back for a friendly visit). They just needed a little bit of help to get back on their feet-- in the form of a security deposit, or help getting new ID's so they could find employment. About half of the people who come into our shelter are there less than two weeks. Because of the work that we and other similar agencies do, Connecticut has been recognized by the federal government as one of the first two states in the nation to make homelessness rare and brief, especially among veterans. We could not do this work without your support and investment.

I ask today that you consider the following important items when it comes to continuing to combat homelessness in our state:

- Maintain vital homeless system resources for youth, individuals and families. This includes funding the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services line at \$85.8 million, and the Homeless Youth line at \$2.3 million.
- 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.
- A targeted investment of \$1.47 million in the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services will enhance our state's capacity to quickly resolve episodes

of homelessness for individuals and youth requiring shelter through the use of 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 can feel like an overwhelming problem with no permanent solution. However, the reality is, that in New London, we are ending homelessness every single day-- for individuals and families. We need your help to continue this important work-- work that I have no doubt saves lives. I urge you to support the proposed investments in frontline homeless services, supportive housing, and support services that save public resources and help families and individuals transition to housing, stability, and hope.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and thank you for your support to efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

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