



**Appropriations Budget Hearing
On 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 honorable members of the committee, my name is Kiley Gosselin and I am the Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). We are a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. PSC staffs and manages the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to end homelessness in Connecticut. We, and our many partners, know that homelessness is an unacceptable condition and an expensive public policy problem, and we know what works to prevent and end it. 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.

Connecticut continues to be a leader in the nation in efforts to address the important and expensive problem of homelessness. Last year we again experienced a decline in the number of people using emergency shelters. Still, more than 3,000 people are homeless on any given day in Connecticut and each day more households will find themselves homeless.

We know what it will take to make homelessness rare, brief and one-time by 2023 for everyone. Investment in proven solutions to homelessness are necessary to continue our progress and ensure that every youth, family, and individual has a stable place to call home. These investments are working. The numbers of those experiencing homelessness are going down year after year. Connecticut has seen a 66% reduction in chronic homelessness since 2016 and a 40% reduction in shelter use since 2012. Connecticut was recognized in 2016 by the federal government as one of the first to states in the nation to reach the rare, brief and one-time milestone for veterans. Together we can be the first state in the nation to achieve this goal.

The investments detailed below are a significant step towards reaching that 2023 goal for all Connecticut residents.

2020 Legislative Priorities

1. Maintain the budget as enacted at \$85.8 million for the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services line.

With over 8,000 people experiencing homelessness in Connecticut this past year, including more than 500 children under age 5, it is critical that we maintain investments in services available for youth, individuals and families. This line item provides funding for a variety of critical housing and homelessness services and supports. As our data capabilities continue to



progress, we are better able to not only track individuals and families as they enter and exit the homelessness system, but also determine when and how different housing and service resources are best used to assist people in exiting homelessness more quickly and ensuring that they remain stably housed permanently. Furthermore, we are better able to see and predict trends and determine, with increasing specificity, how the infusion of new resources will be best spent to get us to our goal of ending homelessness in Connecticut fastest.

The resources funded through this line item include the Rental Assistance Program (RAP). - essential for supportive housing, as well as frontline homeless services, outreach and emergency shelters. These services aid those who have fallen into homelessness and help to move them quickly into housing.

2. Maintain the budget as enacted at \$2.3 million for the Department of Housing's Homeless Youth line.

We are also in support of the proposal to support the Homeless Youth Line Item at \$2.3 million. This line item provides funding for youth outreach services, crisis housing options, and other supports and services that help to transition youth into more safe and stable outcomes. The needs and experiences of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults differ drastically compared to other populations who find themselves experiencing homelessness or housing instability, so having a unique source of funding to help support them is equally as critical as money allocated for other processes and services in the homeless response system.

Although we are still learning about how to best reach and serve this population, we are setting goals and making strides. The statewide youth count indicated that more than 5,000 youth were experiencing housing instability or homelessness in 2019. Efforts are underway to identify and mitigate some of the barriers they may face in getting connected to housing resources so that their experience of homelessness can be a rare, brief, one-time event, and funding for these efforts will be essential in connecting them to resources they need to thrive. Collaboration with educational institutions and partners at DCF and CSSD are also critical components of our work that will assist in ensuring that funding is spent in the most efficient manner possible.

3. 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.

We support adding funding for the Coordinated Access Network (CAN) Infrastructure to a new line item called 'Homeless Supports' for \$2.3 million at the DOH. These funds are crucial to advancing our statewide efforts to end homelessness. We know what works to end homelessness – through coordinated efforts to secure the right housing and supports, we can resolve homelessness. For calendar year 2019, 2-1-1, the state's human service information and referral helpline, received 72,000 calls. Utilizing that single point of entry has allowed us to quickly screen and offer resources. When appropriate, connections are made to the other critical links in the infrastructure we have created, such as our eight Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) now serving all individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness across the state. The CAN infrastructure allows us to greatly reduce duplication by assisting



individuals in a coordinated and streamlined way that includes a single point of entry, a unified assessment tool, diversion, prioritization, and matching for appropriate housing resources.

CANs allow us to more effectively assign the right resources to each person to end their homelessness. We had never before been able to triage clients according to need. Resources were assigned often only on a “first come, first served” basis, and many of the highest need clients were not served appropriately, or at all. The system we have built through Coordinated Access allow our communities to respond better to client needs, and to assign services and housing more effectively and efficiently, including to those with the most severe and complex needs.

Creating a dedicated funding source to support the infrastructure CT has built for the CAN system is critical to maintaining progress on making homelessness rare, brief and on-time by 2023 in Connecticut.

4. Create a targeted investment of \$1.47 million in the Department of Housing’s Housing/Homeless Services line for housing stabilization.

Preventing households from becoming homeless and exiting them quickly and permanently from our system when they do need shelter access is critical to reducing pressure on our emergency shelter system and making homelessness rare, brief and one-time in Connecticut.

Flexible sources of funding that can be used to divert people from becoming homeless are far more cost-effective than shelter and other emergency resources. Often all that is needed to prevent homelessness is paying a rent arrearage, utility costs, a simple car repair or assisting someone with landlord engagement or service access. These are dollars wisely invested from a cost-benefit standpoint and prevent the life-altering traumatic consequences that often come with homelessness. Similarly reducing that time in shelter and using flexible funds to rapidly exit people to stability is far more cost effective than having households staying in shelter for months at a time.

5. Establish additional targeted funding for the Department of Housing’s Housing/Homeless Services line at \$1 million for rental assistance.

We can also stably house more individuals and families with supportive housing by providing adequate, safe, and stable housing for highly vulnerable people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness. We know supportive housing is the best housing solution for individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness – long term homelessness with an accompanying disability. Connecticut has been a leader in this space and it has played a big role in our ability to reduce homelessness in our state. We know that investing more in rental assistance with service funding from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services is not only the best solution for helping this population stabilize and thrive, it also saves state dollars that might otherwise go to other expensive resources like emergency rooms, corrections, and long-term shelter stays. New investments like these are critical to reaching our goal of making homelessness rare, brief and one-time by 2023.



Together we can make homelessness rare, brief, and one-time by 2023.

Homelessness is a costly problem, in the toll it takes on human lives, and in consuming substantial public resources. We know what works to make homelessness rare, brief and one-time – through coordinated efforts to secure the right housing and supports, we can resolve homelessness – one person, one family at a time. We know what it will take to achieve this goal by 2023 and know that these investments are an important first step. 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.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. We 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,

Kiley A. Gosselin

Executive Director, Partnership for Strong Communities

