



Appropriations Budget Hearing
On Governor's proposed Mid-term Budget Adjustments for FY2021
Department of Housing, Tuesday, February 11th, 2020

Testimony of **David Rich**
Supportive Housing Works

Wednesday, February 11, 2020

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

Your investment is working. Connecticut continues to lead the nation in its efforts to impactfully address this issue. In the last five years, as we have worked together to build and operationalize a statewide homelessness emergency response system, **the total number of CT residents experiencing homelessness has decreased 32%, and the total number of CT residents experiencing chronic homelessness has decreased by 66%.** This is incredible progress and yet we have so far to go.

Our **progress is the direct result of the state's ongoing dedication of resources** to building and operating a highly effective, regionalized homelessness response system that coordinates service providers across multiple sectors and state agency partners. Dedicated state funding has enabled us to: (1) strategically align regional resources through Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) that ensure unduplicated programming, quality service provision, and data informed accountability; and (2) leverage millions of private philanthropic dollars to serve more people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing homelessness more effectively.

We must have your continued commitment to fund this system in which we have all invested so much, or CT'S hard-won gains will be lost. Dedicated state funding for our innovative homelessness response system must be ongoing. **Our residents, our communities, and our state literally cannot afford to revert to the siloed, uncoordinated, and ineffective methods of decades past.** Investing state funds to address homelessness only after people become homeless --when it is proven to be significantly more expensive and exponentially more complex (involving healthcare, incarceration, foster care, education and emergency services) cannot be CT's strategy.

The state must commit to ongoing support for the homelessness response system you have built and entrusted us to operate. To that end **I urge your support to:**

Protect Vital Homeless System Resources:

- Continue to fund the Department of Housing's Housing/Homeless Services line at \$85.8 million and the Homeless Youth line at \$2.3 million.
- Continue to fund DMHAS Housing Supports and Services at \$23 million.

Stabilize Funding for the Coordinated Access Network

- 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. This is a critical priority of our homeless system.

New Investments in Key Housing and Services to ensure we end homelessness in CT by 2023.

- 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.



- Adding \$1 million each for rental assistance and services will provide stable housing and services for highly vulnerable people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

It is important to consider that homelessness is inextricably linked with availability and access to affordable housing. The National Low-Income Housing Coalition recently determined that CT would **need to add 89,000+ units of affordable housing to meet the needs** of its extremely low-income residents. Currently in our state, there exist only 36 units of affordable housing for every 100 extremely low-income households who need it. Compounding this data, **over the next five years CT is projected to lose nearly 5,000 existing affordable units to expiring deed restrictions.** This affordable housing crisis is driving homelessness in CT.

To fully leverage the state's investment in homeless services, the above budget line items must be accompanied by full support for innovative housing policies that address CT's affordable housing crisis. Please consider:

- **Reorganizing the Zoning Enabling Act and promoting housing planning to equip cities and towns** to meet the state's affordable housing needs. *Develop guidelines for municipal compliance with existing affordable housing planning requirement and require compliance.*
- **Ensuring a continuous pipeline of strategic capital investment and bonding dollars** as a critical means of supporting affordable housing development at an impactful volume. *State investments and subsidies must be available to leverage private investment in affordable housing, providing the foundation for a robust pipeline of affordable housing production and preservation.*
- **Increasing Public Housing Authority's (PHA) capacity** to share services regionally, expand jurisdictions in coordination with surrounding communities, and integrate with CANs to expand voucher use into high opportunity areas. *PHA's bring critical federal \$\$ into the housing and homelessness systems. Communities and residents can't afford dysfunctional, inefficient PHA's.*
- **Creating a statewide, housing database and analysis system** to inform strategic investment in housing and housing programs. *Housing resources must be strategically deployed based on data assessing needs and housing inventory.*

I urge you to support these investments in CT's homelessness response system that save public resources and help families and individuals transition to housing, stability, and hope.

Additionally, I want to impress upon you the importance of **understanding homelessness in the greater context of CT's affordable housing landscape, and in supporting and prioritizing a full spectrum of housing solutions.**

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and left unresolved, a crippling expensive public policy problem that our state cannot afford. Targeted services and access to affordable housing are the only way forward.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and for your support of housing and the homelessness response system in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'DRICH', written over a light blue horizontal line.

David Rich
Executive Director
Supportive Housing Works