

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee
February 21, 2020
DMHAS BUDGET HEARING
H.B. No. 5005 AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE
BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2021
(Stephanie Boyce)

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

My name is Stephanie Boyce and I am the Program Leader/Navigator for Hands On Hartford's Community Meals Day Program. We are located in the heart of downtown Hartford. We are open Monday through Thursday and serve on average 175 individuals each day. Many of the individuals we serve are in shelter, the warming center or are unsheltered. Over the past six months I have seen an increase in individuals who are reporting that they are experiencing homelessness. For many of these individuals it can be hard to trust and engage with providers. Many times, untreated mental health illness, incarceration and other illnesses add to the difficulty of engagement. Due to a need for outreach, I am able to squeeze in two hours a week to provide outreach to the most vulnerable individuals.

Here in Hartford, we have an outreach team that consists of a number of organizations working together to identify and reach the unsheltered individuals. We know that there are number of individuals living outside that are unknown to the system. By providing enhanced outreach services at \$375,000 at the Department of

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Mental Health and Addiction Services' Housing Supports and Services line would enable us to pair support services with the rental assistance and improve housing stability, income and employment, health and wellness issues, and enhance connections to community resources.

Last spring, I began to connect with a gentleman in his fifties with a number of complex medical issues as well as untreated mental health. This man was known to many as an individual who was difficult to engage with. Every week, I would meet with him, offer him assistance and welcome him to our meal program. Each time he entered our meal program, I would converse with him and ensure that he had everything he needed to survive outside. He had been sleeping outside in various city parks for a number of years. Each week I would ask if he wanted to seek shelter and each week he said that he was not ready. As the leaves changed colors, so did his mind. One afternoon as he finished eating lunch, he told me that earlier in the day he was at Bushnell Park. He noticed that many people were walking their dogs and thought to himself that if all those dogs have a safe and warm place to lay their heads at night then he deserved that as well. I asked him if he was ready to go into shelter and he said yes. Due to his mental health and other medical needs, I was able to secure a shelter bed for him within a short amount of time. He is still at that shelter and is close to getting housed. There are many more individuals just like this man. We need more outreach workers to begin and to continue making this vital human connection.

Homelessness is costly, in the toll it takes on human lives, and in consuming substantial public resources. We know what works to end homelessness-through coordinated efforts to secure the right to 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 hearing my testimony and thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie J. Boyce". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S".

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