

Appropriations Budget Hearing

On Governor's proposed Mid-Term Budget Adjustments for FY2021

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for receiving my testimony today on the vital investments being proposed through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services budget to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

My name is Barbara Shaw, a registered voter in the City of Hartford and the Executive Director of the non-profit Hands On Hartford where we serve neighbors, engage volunteers and connect communities to ensure housing stability, food security and good health for our neighbors.

We are fortunate, and proud, that Connecticut is a leader in the nation in our efforts to address the horrible and expensive problem of homelessness. Here in Connecticut we've invested in proven strategies, made great strides in ending Veterans homelessness, have dramatically reduced chronic homelessness and are better coordinating our crisis response system.

Yet despite these victories, every single day folks become homeless. They face not only the trauma of no longer having their own place to lay their head, or the worry about how their children will cope, or wonder how they can possibly manage work or school without a stable home, but also face a sometimes bewildering system of support, often while dealing with complex behavioral health conditions. Therefore I'd like to speak in support of House Bill No 5005, notably to support the :

- Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' enacted budget of \$23 million in the Housing Supports and Services line
- And the proposed new investment of \$1 million to this line to pair support services with rental assistance to improve housing stability, employment, health and wellness, and access to community resources.
- Additionally, to speak in support of the proposal to provide enhanced outreach services at \$375,000, enabling us to better identify people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

More often than not, the women, men, and families who face homelessness have complex lives, struggle with a variety of illnesses and conditions, all in addition to poverty. Outreach services provide vital supports by a trained and sensitive and knowledgeable person who can help homeless folks untangle the web of the crisis response system, ensure that they are directed to the right supports to find

Board of Directors

Donna K. Manocchio,

Chairperson

Daniel Arsenault

Cynthia Bates

Autumn Bosworth

Christopher Brechlin

Tracie Brown

Leroy Butler

Lisa Cameron

Bryan Hooper

Thomas Kainamura

Brian Neary

Nitza Rivera

Bobbi Schmidt

Dianna M. Wallquist

Sharon M. Ware

Barbara A. Shaw, LCSW,

Executive Director

Hands On Hartford

55 Bartholomew Avenue

Hartford, CT 06106

T 860-728-3201

F 860-549-8550

www.handsonhartford.org

info@handsonhartford.org

immediate help, and are guided to the channels that will allow them to find a home once again.

Over the three decades that I've had the privilege of doing this work to address and end homelessness there have been a few things I've learned:

- People in need don't automatically trust us or the system, often because of histories of trauma or broken trust; and sometimes due to mental health issues
- Our system, though improving, is confusing to the layperson (think of all the long trainings that are needed to provide people information on the Coordinated Access Network!). So imagine how it appears to people in a crisis
- Services aren't always provided where homeless people need them; and some homeless folks are completely out of the mainstream (some even hiding from the mainstream), until untreated physical or mental health or substance use issues create enough of a crisis to send folks to expensive urgent care through the emergency departments.
- An outreach worker can be the very best person to go out there and find folks, help them navigate the system, help them obtain care before a crisis. Outreach workers slowly build trust, go where other providers don't go, and are equipped with a tool kit that often puts homeless people back on the road to housing where case managers supported by the DMHAS budget can ensure that people have the skills and help to successfully address a myriad of issues to remain stable.

We know that having stable, safe, affordable housing is the single most important factor which allows all of us to have healthy, meaningful lives and raise healthy, successful children. Ensuring that there's a guide who can help homeless individuals and families to find their way back to their own place to lay their heads is vital. Having flexible, supportive services once there is vital too --- for our neighbors and for the health and vitality of our communities as well.

Thank you again for this chance to speak in support of the provisions of H.B. 5005. And thank you for joining us in this work to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,



Barbara A. Shaw, LCSW
Executive Director
Hands On Hartford
February 21, 2020