

**Appropriations Budget Hearing
On Governor's proposed Mid-term Budget Adjustments for FY 2021
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Friday, February 21, 2020**



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Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and Members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to end homelessness in Connecticut.

I am **Cathy Zeiner, Chief Strategy and Operations Officer of YWCA Hartford Region**, where as part of our work to eliminate racism and empower women, we operate an emergency shelter serving more than 80 women per year, and a 48-unit supportive and affordable housing complex in Hartford.

As you know, the investments that Connecticut has made in ending homelessness are working. The numbers of those experiencing homelessness have been decreasing, with a **66% reduction in chronic homelessness since 2016**. So, we support continuing those investments through the budget for DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line.



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However, homelessness is not a static problem – we still have far too many people in crisis and becoming homeless daily – and we need your leadership to address the challenges created by the fact that funding of nonprofit contracts have not kept pace with inflation or adequately covered increased costs and demand for services.

Even though homelessness in CT has been decreasing, on any given night, there are still between 50-100 unsheltered women in the Hartford area.

We have worked to address this issue by patching together funding from private sources to supplement our contract to put more shelter beds in service, but increasingly, we have had to use those private funds just to keep our shelter operations from deteriorating further.

- **We used to have a full-time Program Manager to cover both our Emergency Shelter and our Permanent Supportive Housing Programs. Now, that person only works two days a week in our programs, because she has 4 additional housing programs to cover for our collaborating agency.**
- **To make matters worse, that same Program Manager has had to cover for lost staff, as turnover has increased in staff who**



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have had increasing size and complexity of caseloads but not had raises.

- **Our shelter has no overnight case manager, and only 8 hours of coverage on Saturday.** There is a residential aide on duty, but that aide must cover the entire building (the shelter, the permanent supportive housing program, and when necessary, 19 subsidized apartments).

These conditions – plus the diminished community-based resources for substance abuse treatment - have put our participants at risk.

- Before Thanksgiving, we lost one long-time PSH resident to an overdose.
- Before Christmas, we had another collapse in the lobby. With only one aide on duty for the building, it was a shelter participant with her own Narcan that was there first and revived him.

Overall, the system is succeeding in housing more people, but those in our programs are increasingly complex. We need additional resources to meet the demands of our communities.

Therefore, we also respectfully request that the legislature appropriate \$461 million over five years for community nonprofits.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. I ask that you **please restore the Department of Housing and Homelessness line item to \$78.6 million.**

Thank you for your time, and your efforts to end homelessness in
Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Catherine Zeiner
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