

**Governor's Proposed Budget FY2021-23 Appropriations Hearing
HB 6439 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Department of Housing
Friday, February 19th, 2021**

Submitted by Lisa Tepper Bates, President & CEO, United Way of Connecticut

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 6439 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Lisa Tepper Bates and I am the President and CEO of United Way of Connecticut.

Governor Lamont's proposed budget provides funding for critical housing and homelessness services and supports. Thanks to the leadership from the Governor and the Department of Housing and the ongoing support of the legislature, Connecticut continues to lead the nation in efforts to end homelessness – saving lives and saving tax dollars.

The state's innovative leadership and its investment in ending homelessness through the Coordinated Access Network System has made Connecticut a national leader. Since 2012, the number of people utilizing Connecticut's shelter system has decreased **57% (See Appendix, figure 1)**. Investing in proven solutions to end homelessness is necessary in continuing our progress and ensuring that every youth, family, and individual has a safe, stable place to call home.

In 2014, 211 Connecticut (a program of United Way of Connecticut) became the front door for Connecticut's Coordinated Access Network (CAN) **(See Appendix, figure 2)**. Coordinated Access helps people who are homeless or imminently homeless access community resources within seven regions, aimed at fulfilling the federal HEARTH Act's goals of: 1) avoiding homelessness whenever possible; 2) minimizing the length of stay in shelter; and 3) preventing the need to re-enter shelter after leaving. This is accomplished through collaboration among many community and state and local government partners under state leadership.

In 2020, 211 responded to more than 100,000 inquires over the phone from people in need of housing services, many of whom were facing imminent risk of homelessness. 211 Contact Specialists provided assistance to help many of these callers with diversion strategies aimed at keeping them in their homes by linking them to utility assistance, basic needs assistance, financial assistance and other supports.

Connecticut's continued success in fighting homelessness requires that we continue to invest in critical staff infrastructure to support Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) and 211. United Way of Connecticut is in strong support of the \$2.3M in specific funding for Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) to a new line item called 'Homeless Supports' at the DOH.

United Way of Connecticut also respectfully requests that the committee support the following proposals from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH).

- We support funding for the DOH Housing and Homelessness Line Item at \$85.5 million.
 - The Governor's budget proposes cutting \$3M from this line reflecting lapses for specific programs. We request that those funds be repurposed for the Rental Assistance Program and/or homeless services.
- We are also in support funding for the DOH Homeless Youth Line Item at \$2.65M in FY 22 and \$2.94M in FY 23
- Lastly, we support an additional investment of \$2M in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services Line to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic has only served to underscore how crucially important it is for all Connecticut residents to have safe and adequate housing. 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. The Coordinated Access Networks (CAN) system (including emergency shelters, rapid re-housing, the 211 housing unit, and community level coordination) are the linchpins of the homeless response system and critical to maintaining our progress in ending homelessness.

211 is proud to be partners with the state, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, dozens of shelter providers and public and nonprofit agencies, and the Partnership for Strong Communities in this crucial work to end homelessness. We respectfully request that the state continue its investment in Connecticut's Coordinated Access system which has helped many Connecticut residents avoid homelessness, avoided the need for much costlier interventions, and made Connecticut a national leader in fighting homelessness.

Thank you for your continued commitment to addressing homelessness in Connecticut. It is the right thing to do, good for our people, good for our communities and good for Connecticut.

Thank you,

Lisa Tepper Bates
President & CEO
United Way of Connecticut

Appendix

Figure 1. Ending Homelessness in Connecticut

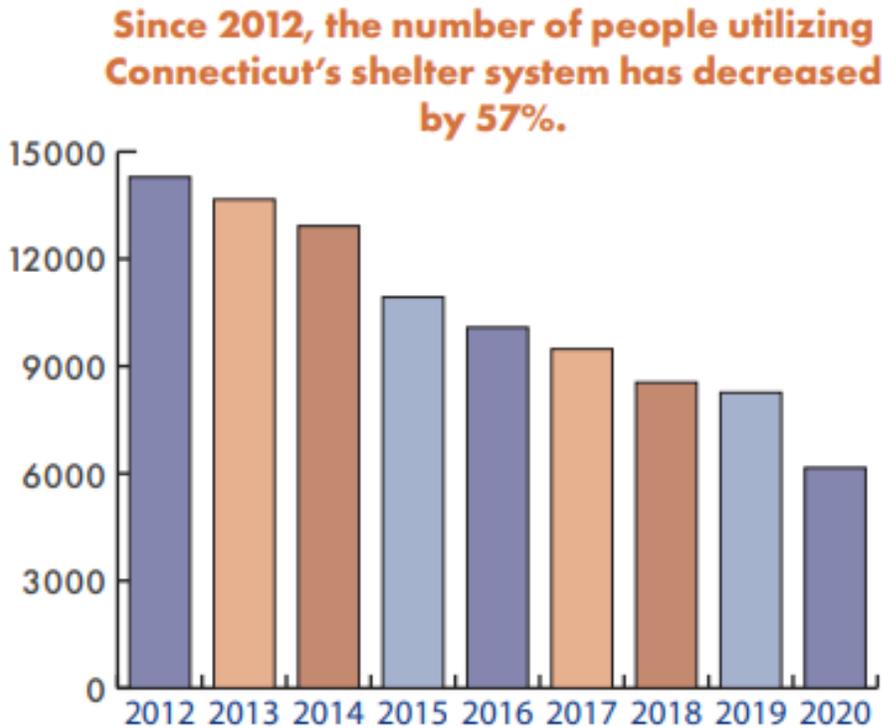
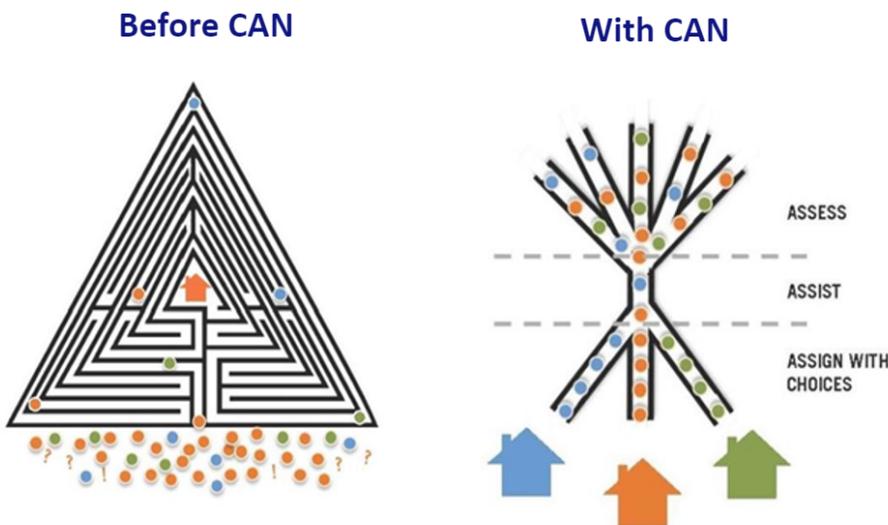


Figure 2. Coordinating a True System



In 2014, 211 became the front door to CT's coordinated homelessness response system (Coordinated Access Network/CAN)

- **Assess** the caller's needs and housing situation
- **Address** caller's crisis by helping meet basic needs – food, income, utilities, behavioral health
- **Problem-solve** with caller to identify next steps to resolve the housing situation through community resources and natural supports
- **Connect** the caller to the local coordinated access network if caller is homeless or at imminent risk, including directly scheduling a local housing/shelter services intake