



**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**

**Stacey Violante Cote
Director of Operations
Center for Children's Advocacy**

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This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Center for Children's Advocacy, a statewide private, non-profit legal organization. The Center provides holistic legal representation for poor children in Connecticut's communities through individual representation and systemic advocacy. I am Director of Operations at the Center and Director of the Homeless Youth Advocacy Project, which provides direct legal services to youth throughout the state. Additionally, I chair the Youth and Young Adult Homelessness Workgroup of the Reaching Home Campaign, the campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know that safe, affordable, and permanent housing is the only solution to homelessness. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for permanent housing for all of Connecticut's residents has become even more important.

I respectfully request that the Committee support the following proposals from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing (DOH).

- **We support funding for the DOH Homeless Youth Line Item at \$2.65M in FY 22 and \$2.94M in FY 23**
- **We also 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.**

Fighting for the legal rights of Connecticut's most vulnerable children

The Homeless Youth line item provides critical funding for youth outreach services, crisis housing for youth, and housing services and supports. These are vital services to transition youth from crisis to stability. This program is essential for addressing homelessness amongst unaccompanied young people. More than 7,800 youth were estimated to be experiencing homelessness or serious housing instability in the 2020 statewide Youth Outreach and Count. Of those, 2,462 were estimated to be what's called, "literally homeless," meaning staying on the streets, in shelter, or in a place not meant for human habitation.¹ We also know that people of color and LGBTQ youth are over-represented in youth homelessness.²

We recognize that the pandemic has created tough decisions for our state budget. Governor Lamont, past Governors, and you, our legislative leaders, have long understood and supported the importance of ending homelessness in our state in both fiscal and human terms, especially in light of the pandemic.

Because of this, Connecticut is a national model in ending homelessness and, in particular, youth homelessness.

Currently, the Homeless Youth Program has more than 300 youth on their waitlist for youth-specific housing.³ The program also has critical- but very limited- emergency beds for youth. Without the Homeless Youth Program, many of the more than 2,400 youth experiencing literal homelessness will not have a place to sleep.

These youth are vulnerable. They need immediate services when they experience homelessness. The findings from the 2020 Youth Outreach and Count tell us that more than 50% of these youth did not have a high school diploma, more than 50% were not employed and there is a high level of criminal justice and child welfare involvement among this population.⁴

The data is echoed in the voices of the youth who call us on a regular basis saying they have no place to go, are sleeping in hallways, and need help. The Homeless Youth Program is a life-line for these extremely vulnerable youth. Please support this funding.

Respectfully submitted,

Stacey Violante Cote

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¹ CT Coalition to End Homelessness, "2020 Youth Outreach and Count Report," available at: <https://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Youth-Count-FINAL.pdf> .

² 31% were Black/African American, 31.6% were Hispanic/Latino and nearly 1 out of 5 respondents struggling with housing were LGBTQ+. Id at 15, 17, 18.

³ This is in addition to the "By Name List" of youth identified by the homeless system as needing housing.

⁴ CT Coalition to End Homelessness, "2020 Youth Outreach and Count Report," available at: <https://cceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Youth-Count-FINAL.pdf> .