

Hello members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Aleena Durant. In support of the Governor's proposed budget which preserves funding and resources for the homeless youth line item, I would like to share my story of my experience with The Connection Start Program which is funded through the Homeless Youth Line Item.

Prior to getting connected with the program, I had my worst experience with being homeless. I had times where I was staying with friends and relatives. I was sleeping on the floor with my son, or if the person had an extra room or living area, I would sleep there. Not having my own place made it very tough for me to truly be stable and focus on the areas in my life that would bring me closer towards success. Being homeless really discouraged my hope because I was working so hard in having a stable employment and even a decent childcare without the constant worry of where we would be laying our head down next. What made my experience with homelessness most difficult was introduction of the new normal. All while I was going through my housing crisis, I also had many transitions with employment due to losing my job because of COVID-19. Not only that, a lot of programs had lack of funding supports, including over-capacitated waitlists, and limited resources because of the mandatory implemented safety restrictions. It was like every good step was followed by several setbacks.

Following being connected with the Program Manager, who was inspired by my story that I had shared and was adamant that I received support that is out there. After having a basic conversation, I was then connected with a case manager to set up an intake session. The timing of being connected and determining my eligibility was quick and consistent. After being accepted, The Connection Start Program prepared me for the transition into housing. I had set up a clear budget and spent time looking for housing. At the beginning, it was tough finding a landlord that would trust me as a tenant with my previous housing errors. Despite the denials as I was seeking housing that met the requirements for the program, I was able to find housing and a landlord that provided me an opportunity with the security of the program.

Since I have been participating in the program, I have returned to school as well as found a good job and additional opportunities. I have been able to focus on my finances as well as feeling comfortable that I am in a stable environment. Mentally, I also feel that I have become more positive and more confident because there are programs out there that follow through with what they offer, and they make sure that you are in the right path afterward.

Thank you for your time in reading my testimony and thank you for your continued support of these important services for homeless young people.

Sincerely,

Aleena Durant
Hartford, CT