



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
Governor's Proposed Budget FY21 and FY23  
(HB 6439 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023)**

**Department of Housing  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19<sup>TH</sup>, 2021**

**KILEY GOSSELIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and honorable members of the committee, my name is Kiley Gosselin, and I am the Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). We are a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. PSC staffs and manages both the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent end homelessness in Connecticut and the HOMEConnecticut Campaign to ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to a range of affordable housing choices in all communities. Each campaign brings together over 100 state and non-profit partners to identify and implement data-driven policy solutions and prepare consensus legislative agendas. Thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of critical investments through the Department of Housing (DOH).

I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Housing:

- 1. Strongly support funding for the DOH Housing and Homelessness Line Item at \$85.5 million. Please restore the \$3M cut to this line proposed by the Governor's proposed budget.**

This line item provides funding for a variety of critical housing and homelessness services and supports including the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) - as well as frontline homeless services, outreach to unsheltered individuals, and emergency shelters. These services aid those who have fallen into homelessness and help to move them quickly into permanent housing. When Connecticut residents have access to safe and stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. This is true under any circumstance, but COVID-19 has shown that ensuring access to permanent housing is imperative.

The Governor's proposed budget includes a cut of \$3 million to this line item reflecting lapsed funds from the CHES program and for RAPS from the DSS-administered Money Follows the Person (MFP) program. Our state waiting list for families seeking RAPs, however has been closed due to oversubscription and the need for the flexible housing assistance that the Rental Assistance Program provides has never been greater. RAPs adjust with families' income and allow them to move where they need to be closer to jobs, childcare or family. We strongly advocate for repurposing all of those fun lapsed funds for RAPs the many families in Connecticut that are on waiting lists and need them or using the funds to strengthen services for our homeless service system and CANs.



**We support an additional investment in the DOH Housing and Homelessness Line Item of \$2M in FY 22 and FY 23**

In 2004 then Governor Rowland issued Executive Order #34, setting up an Interagency Council that led an effort to create 10,000 units of supportive housing. Through that effort and state funding, approximately 7,000 were created. Connecticut has since been viewed as a leader in both affordable housing production and in decreasing homelessness in large part because of these efforts. In 2020, statewide partners through the Reaching Home Campaign, including the Corporation for Supportive Housing, developed a model to quantify the need for Supportive Housing throughout CT. That model demonstrates that we need to finish the job we started with supportive housing and create more units for higher-needs individuals who continue to enter our homeless service system.

Supportive housing continues to be one of the most effective housing models and has been proven to cut public system costs by up to 70%. In order to meet the housing and service needs of individuals and families with persistent obstacles to maintaining housing stability, we ask for this additional funding to provide scattered-site rental assistance to an additional 200 households. These new units would allow Connecticut to further reduce the number of high-needs individuals who often cycle in and out of homelessness as well as other institutional settings such as corrections.

**2. Support funding for the DOH Homeless Youth Line Item at \$2.65M in FY 22 and \$2.94M in FY 23**

This line item provides funding for youth outreach, crisis housing options, and other supports and services that help to transition youth into safe and stable housing. The needs and experiences of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults differ drastically compared to other populations who find themselves experiencing homelessness or housing instability - having a unique source of funding to help support them is equally as critical as money allocated for other processes and services in the homeless response system.

We strongly support the small increase in this line item which will serve as matching funds needed for the Federal Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project Connecticut was awarded thanks to our progressive action and continued state investment in the area of youth homelessness. This program provides critical services to youth experiencing homelessness and leverages \$6.5M in federal dollars.

**3. Support the addition of \$2.3M in specific funding for Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) to a new line item called 'Homeless Supports' at the DOH.**

These funds are crucial to advancing our statewide efforts to end homelessness. From October 2019 to October 2020, 2-1-1, the state's human service information and referral helpline, received 74,852 calls related to temporary shelter (that's up from 59,710 in the prior year) and 224,863 for housing-related concerns. 2-1-1 referred 16,452 households seeking housing services and supports to one of seven Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) which serve all individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness across the state. The CAN infrastructure greatly reduces duplication and provides efficient assistance to households streamlined way via a single point of entry, unified assessment, diversion, prioritization, and matching to appropriate and available housing resources. The CAN system allows our communities to respond better to client needs, and to assign services and housing more effectively and efficiently, including to those with the most severe and complex needs.

Our CAN's need stable, consistent funding. Although our CAN system in Connecticut is cited as a national model, it is funded largely through philanthropic contributions and small amounts of administrative funds through other services. The state funding that has come to CANs has come from CIA funds administered at the discretion of the Department of Housing. Without a more stable funding source, CANs are often forced to lay-off staff while awaiting new funding, leading to gaps in service coverage and longer wait times for intake assessments for those experiencing homelessness. CANs are a vital part of our state's social safety net and do a tremendous job of efficiently matching individuals and families with appropriate services and housing, leading to cost savings in other systems of care. Ensuring that our CANs continue to have the resources they need to do this work, ensures that when Connecticut residents do find themselves in a housing emergency, that they will be aided in a swift, cost-effective way to achieve permanent housing stability.

#### **4. Provide \$100M in necessary rental relief funding in response to harm caused by the Covid-19 Pandemic.**

Investing an additional \$100 million in state funding would provide relief to tenants and stabilize landlords operating budgets and Connecticut's rental market. While the state recently utilized \$27 million of CRF funds and received another \$235 million for rental relief in Connecticut, both local and national estimates put the total need in our state at least \$500 million. Persistent job losses due to Covid-19 have increased the risk of families becoming unstably housed or homeless. Rental relief is also an issue of racial equity. Historically, families of color in our state are disproportionately impacted by the healthcare crisis and Covid-19 is no exception, infecting and killing people of color at higher rates than white residents. Similarly, families of color are disproportionately impacted by housing discrimination and eviction.

Furthermore, the pandemic has undermined the stability of our state's rental housing market. Small multifamily landlords whose units make up approximately 25% of our state's rental housing stock and are predominately located in our urban centers, are being especially hit hard. It is critical that we step up and support these property owners and their tenants so that they can adequately maintain their often older properties, continue to pay property taxes and mortgages, and, most importantly, continue to provide this vital housing resource in our state. Our failure to do so could result in significant, long-term instability in this market - a market which notably often serves as a wealth-building ladder for lower and moderate-income residents and communities of color and houses many of our state's hard-working lower-income families.

#### **5. Invest \$20M in funding for additional state RAPs (Rental Assistance Program).**

The RAP program should be expanded by at least \$20 million per year to support more of our lowest income households. Prior to Covid-19, 120,000 renter households spent more than 50% of their income on housing costs. The RAP program serves as a flexible tool to address housing insecurity and assist severely cost-burdened renters as the assistance adjusts with changes in household income. During Covid-19, this has allowed vulnerable renters impact by unemployment and health emergencies to remain housed without the need for separate rental assistance programs. RAPs are a much more cost-effective way to provide affordable housing versus construction of new, deed-restricted units. RAPs also allow families to choose where they live and move to be closer to job opportunities, childcare or family supports. Finally, RAPs support the stability of Connecticut's private



rental market, providing a stable source of income to private property owners while ensuring that a basic level of housing quality and safety is met.

Homelessness and housing instability are unacceptable conditions for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. We know what works to remedy these conditions and these investments are a critical piece of the puzzle. It costs more to allow homelessness and housing instability to persist than it does to resolve it. PSC and our partners in both the Reaching Home Campaign and the HOMEConnecticut Campaign acknowledge the historic and ongoing role of systemic racism in creating and perpetuating disproportionality in representation of Black, Indigenous, and people of color in our homeless system and the experience of housing instability in Connecticut.

We urge you to support the proposed investments to remove barriers to services and housing opportunities and choice to advance more equitable outcomes. Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions during this public health crisis – it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut’s residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,



Kiley Gosselin  
Executive Director  
Partnership for Strong Communities

