



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

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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify 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 David Rich with Supportive Housing Works, the backbone organization for the homeless system in Western CT and I am a resident of Lakeville CT.

Kelly Fitzgerald gave an overview of the CAN system and its integral importance to ending homelessness in CT. I'll be focusing my testimony today on the CANs activities in the last 11 months during the pandemic.

In the early days of the pandemic, there was understandably a lot of fear and trepidation. We were not sure how COVID-19 would impact the homeless community. The main impact was in our shelter systems. Many shelters closed down and others found themselves very short-staffed with staff needing to isolate and quarantine.

Though congregate settings had the potential to be disastrous in the wake of COVID-19, we instead turned this experience into a model of true success through state and private collaboration. DOH, DMHAS, DSS, DPH, FEMA, the Governor's office, and state COVID teams coordinated with the CANs. Meeting three times a week, this Taskforce worked to develop and implement a plan to not only keep many of the most vulnerable in our communities safe but to keep moving these families and individuals into permanent housing placements. We are grateful for the rapid coordinated response of these partners in a very chaotic time.

There were three key strategies the Taskforce implemented: **Shelter, Hotel, Housing**

- **Shelter** – Focus here was on decompressing the shelters and preparing them to adhere to CDC guidelines and best practices for operation during the pandemic. This included acquiring appropriate ventilation and dividers to help reorient physical shelter spaces, training and new protocols for staff. Also included outreach efforts and trying to make sure staff and those experiencing unsheltered homelessness stayed safe.
- **Hotel** – DOH worked with the state to contract for 12 hotels (850 rooms) across CT. Shelters and CAN partners had to work together to provide on-site staffing, food, coordinated services, and testing as it became available.



- **Housing** – In addition, \$20 Million was made available in ESG and FEMA funding. Still meeting three times a week, the Taskforce worked with DOH to get CARES Act funding out to CANs and agencies to help move people from hotels into more sustainable housing placements. In the last 6 months, approximately 1,800 households have been exited from hotels into permanent housing.

The culmination of these partnerships, fast acting and available funding proved successful, seeing only about 2.7 positive tests in Western CT and two reported deaths in the broader homeless population.

We 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. The CANs are a wonderful case example of a public/private partnership, that has proven effective when compared to efforts to move the needle on ending homelessness elsewhere in the nation. These successes have been achieved through partnership and collaboration and lacks a necessary stable funding stream to help support the infrastructure we've worked hard to build over the last several years.

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,

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