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Board Chair

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President & CEO

**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**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for reading my testimony today regarding important investments we can make through the Department of Housing to support efforts increase housing opportunity in Connecticut.

My name is Domenique Thornton, Esq. I am the general counsel for Mental Health Connecticut (MHC), a private non-profit that partners with individuals, families, and communities to create environments that support long-term health and wellness. We support approximately 1,000 people per day through our advocacy, community education, and services that include housing supports and wrap around services in Stamford, Bridgeport, Danbury, Waterbury, Torrington, and West Hartford.

MHC is also a member of the statewide **HOMEConnecticut Campaign** to expand housing opportunity in Connecticut and improve strategies for mental health recover. We, alongside many other partners in the state, know safe, affordable housing is critical for the health of our state's residents and our economy. When our state's residents have stable housing, their economic as well as health outcomes improve. During COVID-19, the need for stable housing for all of Connecticut's residents has become even more important.

We respectfully request that the committee support the following additional investments through the Department of Housing (DOH).

MHC supports increasing three items of H.B.6439 with respect to housing:

- We support the addition of \$100M in additional emergency Covid-19 rental relief to support our state's low-income residents and the landlords housing them.



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- We support the addition of \$20M in additional investments for the Rental Assistance Program (RAP). These state vouchers are the most cost-effective way to provide affordable housing, adjust with family income, and allow tenant mobility.
- Lastly, we support an additional investment of \$2M in DOH's Housing/Homeless Services to provide rental assistance to 200 scattered-site supportive housing units.

Mental Health Connecticut (MHC) supports hope and achievement for people with mental health conditions through access to services and supports that promote the four pillars of recovery: (1) home, (2) health, (3) purpose, and (4) community. With a person-centered approach to care, MHC partners with individuals, families, and communities to create environments that support long-term health and wellness. We measure success by our ability to support the recovery journey and help individuals obtain a safe home, achieve whole health, realize a meaningful purpose, and develop connections in the community. Having stable affordable housing is the first of the four pillars of a successful recovery. More than 1 in 10 persons seeking substance abuse or mental health treatment in the public health system in the United States is homeless (SAMHSA, Office of Applied Studies [OAS], 2006).

- Keeping things together while being homeless takes considerable skill and resourcefulness. People who are homeless often have well-developed street skills, resourcefulness, and knowledge of the service system—important strengths that can be built upon in treatment.
- People who are homeless, particularly those with co-occurring mental and substance use disorders, present particular challenges in treatment. All issues must be concurrently addressed for treatment to be effective.
- People with substance use or mental disorders who are homeless are more likely to have immediate life-threatening health conditions and to live in life-threatening situations. The first steps toward healing may be access to medical care **and a safe and healthy place to live.**



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- Trauma is another major co-occurring problem for people who are homeless and have a substance use disorder. One study found that about one fifth of men and one third of women who are chronically homeless and have substance use disorders also have posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD; Jainchill, Hawke, & Yagelka, 2000).
- Safe housing is a point of entry into treatment for many individuals. When safe housing is combined with services, the people have the opportunity to build strengths to move to an active stage of change concerning recovery from mental illness and substance abuse.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Domenique S. Thornton, Esq.