



Homes *with* Hope

*Solving homelessness in our communities through supportive housing.*

**Governor's Proposed Budget FY2021-23**

**Appropriations Hearing**

**HB 6439 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023**

**Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services**

**Tuesday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021**

**Wendy Epstein**

**Director of Supportive Housing**

**Homes with Hope**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today on House Bill 6439 (AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023). I am here to discuss the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Wendy Epstein and I work in Westport and am a resident of Westport, CT.

As the Director of Supportive Housing at Homes with Hope, I supervise seven Case Managers, all of whom work directly with formerly homeless individuals, to keep them safely housed. 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 and expansions from the Governor's budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS):

- I support the proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' Housing Supports and Services line at \$23.4 million in each year of the biennium.
- I request a new targeted investment of \$2.25 million in the DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line to provide supportive services to 300 households in scattered-site and development units.
- I request \$375,000 in new funding in the DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line for enhanced outreach services that would enable us to better identify individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- I support the Governor's proposal to provide an additional \$4 million in FY22 and \$7.2 million in FY23 in DMHAS for continued discharges from Connecticut Valley Hospital, including 30 new Money Follows the Person placements.
- I request the addition of \$352,500 in each year of the biennium for wrap-around services for 47 individuals anticipated to receive federal HUD Mainstream vouchers during FY22.
- I support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance proposal to restore \$461 million over five years to community nonprofits. Funding for nonprofits, including those working to end homelessness, does not adequately cover increased costs and demands for services.



Since 2012, the number of people utilizing Connecticut's shelter system has decreased by 57%. Investing in proven solutions to homelessness is necessary in continuing our progress and ensuring that every youth, family, and individual has a safe, stable place to call home.

I began working to help formerly homeless/mentally ill individuals remain stably housed starting in 2009. As a Case Manager, and now as the Director of Supportive Housing at Homes with Hope, I have seen firsthand how lives can be successfully turned around with the help of housing subsidies and supportive services. Most of our clients come to us with numerous and complex histories, often involving mental illness, substance abuse, poverty, and barriers to employment.

One of my first clients had been adopted into an abusive family as a little boy. Because of his dysfunctional upbringing he grew up with serious anger issues and in his late teens he tried to blow up gas station. Because of this substantial criminal offense, he was incarcerated from ages 18 to 26. When he was released, this client had limited skills, a criminal history and a family that wanted nothing to do with him. He was very depressed and understandably frustrated and quickly found himself homeless. Fortunately, he was able to move into supportive housing – where he was able to take the time, he needed to get his life on a better track. Since he moved into his own apartment this individual has gotten a job, stopped smoking, lost weight, and gotten a new front tooth. He also volunteers for the town of Westport in a variety of ways and feels very good about being a contributing member of society. I am immensely proud of the man he has become and am certain that his strides would not have been possible without the wrap around case management services provided by this funding.

Over the past 12 years I have seen versions of this scenario unfold countless times. But these positive changes require money and resources. Please do what you can to support those most vulnerable in the community. Sometimes the clients who initially seem most difficult are the ones that surprise us. We need to continue to offer opportunities and resources to protect the homeless and empower them to become more self-sufficient and self-reliant. Ultimately, by providing housing subsidies and connections to resources, we are getting our neighbors off the streets and setting them up to be responsible, successful citizens.

I thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony on behalf of them many clients we serve.

Sincerely,

**WENDY EPSTEIN**

Director of Supportive Housing

Homes with Hope

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