



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 30th, 2023

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Tuesday, March 2nd, 2021

Paris Looney

Vice President/COO

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 30th, 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.

Thank you for your attention. My name is Paris Looney and I have been employed with Homes with Hope, Inc., since 2004. I am a resident of Stratford. I am the Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of Homes with Hope a nonprofit in Westport dedicated to ending homelessness in Fairfield County. I have worked with those who are homeless and at risk for homelessness; providing direct services to individuals and families for more than 20 years and believe that safe and affordable housing and permanent supportive housing is the best solution to ending homelessness.

In my years working with the homeless population, I have seen how families unite, children can develop and thrive and people can improve their individual circumstances when they have stable housing as a catalyst for change.

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. The demand for mental health and addiction support has only increased during the pandemic in our town. Many residents have had adult children return home unable to maintain employment during the resulting economic downturn and unable to cope with the economic stress and isolation that the pandemic has caused.
- 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. At Homes with Hope, we have found that supportive services are the key to breaking the cycle of homelessness, by helping clients to maintain their employment, housing, independence and dignity. We provide wrap around services by qualified case managers who have become frontline workers and heroes.



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- 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 have worked as an emergency shelter case manager and supportive housing case manager through the years and seen how important safe, affordable housing as well as permanent supportive housing is for those who struggle with serious mental illness. I worked with a family in our supportive housing program at Powell Place in Westport. A community of 9 units of supportive housing for individuals and families. A family I worked with comes to mind as the mom came to our housing program with serious mental health issues, needing lots of support. She had her daughter with her and eventually reunited with her older son. Mom was immediately engaged in case management services, received a mentor, participated in tenant meetings and had lots of support from the Westport School System. The family stayed together and had a sense of home, community and available support services. The mother lived with us until she passed on. She lived her life with dignity and respect and most importantly did not rotate in and out of family shelters, trying to raise her children. Her daughter grew up and left the home. However, her son continued to struggle with major mental health issues and currently lives in our 6 unit Rotary Centennial House, supportive housing program. If not for supportive housing, he would not have the ability to live independently and would have suffered the loss of his mother and the community that he has known. We work with him on his life skills, securing and maintaining benefits, connections to community services and daily support with his mental health needs.

Your continued support to alleviate homelessness is most appreciated.

Respectfully,

Paris Looney
Vice President/Chief Operating Officer
Homes with Hope, Inc.