



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

Helen McAlinden
President and CEO
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). Homes with Hope is a Westport based organization dedicated to ending homelessness in Fairfield County. 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 Helen McAlinden and I work in Westport and am a resident of Fairfield, CT.

Homes with Hope is a Westport based organization dedicated to ending homelessness in Fairfield County. Homes with Hope is member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut and longtime advocate involved with Opening Doors Fairfield County and all other groups with a priority advocating to end homelessness in CT. 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):

- We 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.
- We 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.
- We 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.
- We 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.



- We 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.
- We 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.

Please support this DMHAS budget. I have worked within the Housing sector for almost two decades and see so much success in getting to a point where everyone has a roof over their head. We still have a lot of work to do. Housing is a basic need but unfortunately due to lack of funding it is not possible for everyone to have a home. DMHAS funding supports the most difficult to serve clients within our state. I am proud to have been involved with DMHAS funded programs for almost two decades and see how supportive housing with wrap around supports helps people to get to a new level to be productive members of society.

I recently met a family as they moved into their new home at Homes with Hope's Permanent Supportive Housing program funded by DMHAS. Their story mirrors many other stories of families that have received housing as a result of DMHAS funding. He had a long history of homelessness, in and out of shelters, and was feeling desperate and depressed. His mental health was declining at the point when he arriving at Homes with Hope. When the pandemic hit he lost his job which caused even more anxiety and issues for the family. He told the heartbreaking story of how he and his wife had to make the decision to allow their daughter to go live with her sister while he and the rest of the family stayed in a homeless emergency shelter. He was delighted when his family was prioritized for housing through the Coordinated Access Network. He was excited to tell how the family members are now reunified, and he is able to get on with his life in his gorgeous new home in Westport, CT.

With the support of his Case Manager, JoAnn, who has a master's degree in clinical social work, he will get the wrap around services he needs to integrate into his new community. He will be able to get his children into a stable school, get set up with a doctor and needed medical services for him and his family. His children can participate in an after school program on-site to support the children's integration into the Westport School System. He will be able to get a job and become a productive member of the community. He longs to get back to a normal life after many years of homelessness. His wife will be able to engage in needed Mental Health services for depression and anxiety as well as many other unaddressed mental health issues.

She has a goal of getting her mental health stable, obtaining a GED and eventually a job. Currently, she wants to make sure she and the children can bond again because they were separated due to homelessness. They have another young child who remained at the shelter with them - the separation for this family has taken a toll on their lives, and the ongoing intensive wraparound case management and housing are necessary to help them get back on their feet together.



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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,

Helen McAlinden

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