



586 Ella T. Grasso Blvd.
P.O. Box 7093
New Haven, CT 06519
(203) 401-4400, ext. 131
www.columbushouse.org

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

Margaret Middleton
CEO
Columbus House, Inc.

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).

My name is **Margaret Middleton and I testify on behalf of Columbus House, Inc.** which helps very low-income people achieve stable housing in New Haven, Middlesex, Hartford, and New London Counties.

Please increase the housing and homeless services line in the DMHAS budget and require value-based contracting for emergency housing agencies as proposed in SB 340.

Everything about the pandemic has made serving the homeless even more challenging; I am so grateful to the team at Columbus House which has turned every challenge into an opportunity to help more people achieve stable permanent housing. That professionalism should be recognized with professional wages.

We support the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance proposal to restore \$461 million over five years but for our agency it does not address a more fundamental problem. We need our contracts to be calculated based on the value that we provide our communities, not on the amount of a contract that we got in the past.

COVID has laid bare the essential role Columbus House plays in the communities we serve. The current level of DMHAS funding does not even cover the minimum wage salaries we pay. Underfunding emergency housing harms our clients, our staff, and our communities because:

- **Emergency Housing is an Essential Part of our State's Public Health and Crisis Response.** Emergency Housing providers have prevented and contained COVID outbreaks. Emergency Housing providers have coordinated thousands of COVID tests. Emergency Housing providers have moved thousands of people into COVID-safe hotel rooms and COVID-safe permanent affordable housing. Emergency Housing providers are coordinating mass vaccination events for



thousands of people as I type. We do not just provide housing; we protect public health, and we respond to emergencies.

- **Emergency Housing is a professional service requiring professional pay.**

The state correctly expects emergency housing to be provided professionally. Clients receive an excellent level of care. Additionally, these agencies are accountable to multiple state agencies for data submissions, quality reporting and accounting on a constant basis. Professional services at this level cannot be provided with antiquated funding notions left over from all volunteer efforts run in church basements.

- **The Minimum Wage-level funding tells Essential Workers of Color their state does not value their service.**

Essential workers, disproportionately people of color, show up every day of the global pandemic to care for those experiencing homelessness. Due to state underfunding Columbus House pays poverty wages for essential work; our staff is one car accident, medical emergency or divorce away from being homeless themselves.

We 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 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.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony and for your continued support in ending homelessness in our great state.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Margaret Middleton".

Margaret Middleton
CEO
Columbus House, Inc

