



90 New Haven Avenue • Milford, CT 06460 • P: 203.876.0747 • F: 203.876.0328

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

**Jennifer Paradis
Executive Director
Beth-El Center, 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). Special thanks to Representative Kennedy, who understands the important work being done in Milford to end homelessness, as she has continuously rolls up her sleeves and supports needs big and small for our Center and our community, knowing how essential these funds are for continued progress.

My name is Jennifer Paradis and as I just mentioned, I'm honored to serve as the Executive Director of Beth-El Center, Inc. in Milford, CT. I am a resident of Middletown, CT and I think it's necessary to share that there were years of my life as a highschooler and young adult where I did not have an address, experiencing homelessness from age 15-21. With this said, this is my life work and the lifework of many of my colleagues who you will hear from today.

I am a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut, focusing on the efficiency and effectiveness of the Coordinated Access Network, and ensuring that the system is responsive to those with the highest barriers to accessing assistance, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. I am also proud to serve on the Board of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. As we come before you today and throughout this legislative session, with our many hats and asks, please note that it is because we are so acutely aware of the needs of our program guests, staff and community that we can ask for the specific needs that we know will get us closer to ending homelessness. It is no longer a matter of "if", but "when".

The COVID-19 pandemic turned the lights on to how underfunded our essential services have been. While communities closed out of fear and necessity, our shelters were spaces of warmth, information, education, PPE, food, shelter and safety- we are still doing that emergency work today. We are an essential part of the State's Crisis Response System and Public Health System. I can personally share the number of occasions in which I have donned full PPE to enter one of our COVID-19 Isolation Rooms, bringing food, clothing, toiletries and human connection, checking on the wellbeing of those diagnosed with this deadly virus; how many nights have spent in quarantine in my own home, afraid to pass along the virus to my loved ones. I can name the 25 staff of the Beth-El Center, Inc. who have done the same over the past year. Those staff deserve to be compensated on a professional pay scale that invests in them as they have invested in our clients, however this has not been the priority of this committee over



90 New Haven Avenue • Milford, CT 06460 • P: 203.876.0747 • F: 203.876.0328

the years and so we must now deal with the harsh reality that at times, our staff become our clients overnight.

With this said, 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), they are critical to the infrastructure we need to end and prevent homelessness throughout the state.

- 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.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony and for your commitment to ending homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Paradis
Beth-El Center, Inc.
JParadis@bethelmilford.org