

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 2, 2021

Submitted by:
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Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Representative Gibson, Senator Hartley, Representative Kennedy, Senator Somers, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for considering 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. My name is Marlaina Rodriguez and I am the MSW Intern at New Reach, Inc. and I also work as the Program Coordinator for Family Promise of Central CT.

I am a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut and I have been working in housing and homelessness services for over 13 years. 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): The following are the asks from our shared legislative agenda.

- 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/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.
- 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.

As a part of the New Reach team, I have seen the impact that DHMAS funded housing support services make. When members of our community are battling addiction or suffering from a mental health crisis, lacking stable housing adds another barrier to recovery and health. Housing is a fundamental basic need, and when that need is met, those who are facing challenges are better equipped to achieve wellness and the opportunity to live a fulfilling, healthy life.

Additionally, when vulnerable populations are stably housed it is proven to save communities money on crisis services like emergency room visits, jails, and psychiatric institutions.¹ Most importantly, supportive housing programs like the ones that New Reach runs, save lives. These services are vital to the community and continuous, adequate funding is truly a necessity.

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

I appreciate this opportunity to present this testimony. Thank you for your dedication to 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.

Respectfully,

Marlaina Rodriguez
MSW Intern at New Reach
and Program Coordinator at Family Promise of Central CT

References:

- 1) United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. (2019). *The Evidence Behind Approaches that Drive an End to Homelessness*. Retrieved from: https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Evidence-Behind-Approaches-That-End-Homelessness-Brief-2019.pdf