

**Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
March 26, 2021**

Madison Alexander
House District 75/Senate District 15

Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Dathan, and Nolan, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in support of SB 340: An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services. My name is Madison Alexander and I live in Waterbury, House District 75 and Senate District 15. I am also working toward my Master's degree in Social Work at UConn with a concentration in Community Organizing.

When we enter the social service field as it currently stands, we accept the implicit expectation that we will by nature be underpaid. During the pandemic, frontline housing providers have been given plenty of lip service praising their selflessness and willingness to literally risk their lives in order to provide their essential services. While it might feel nice for a moment to hear that, it misses the base reality that housing providers are professionals who deserve tangible compensation for their work. By failing to address the poverty-level wages paid to emergency housing providers—disproportionately people of color—our legislature is telling those essential workers that they do not matter. It is frankly insulting to applaud and thank essential frontline workers while simultaneously giving no thought to the financial struggles those workers face on a daily basis. It is darkly ironic that emergency housing providers could land on the other side of the desk searching for services for themselves because their poverty wages make it impossible to remain stably housed.

There is generally frequent employee turnover within social service agencies for a variety of reasons. However, our current circumstances resulting from the pandemic pose additional reasons for frontline emergency housing staff to leave their positions. With the current funding allocated to housing services, some employees are essentially making minimum wage in return for risking COVID exposure during each work shift (including working with people with confirmed positive cases) and taking on unmanageable workloads to cover for understaffing. Put yourself in their shoes: if you could choose to make minimum wage under those conditions or in a setting where your life is not potentially at risk, which would you choose? Underfunded emergency housing services have no resources to pay their employees livable wages in regular circumstances, let alone a public health crisis. It is no surprise that staff are leaving positions where they risk their lives extending emergency support to vulnerable people in housing crisis, only for their paychecks to tell them that their labor is undeserving of livable wages.

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,

Madison Alexander
Resident, House District 75/Senate District 15