



March 26, 2021 Public Hearing Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly's Appropriations Committee In support of Senate Bill 340: An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services

Submitted by Renee Chisolm
Sr. Site Coordinator at New Reach, Inc.

Dear Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and members of the Committee on Appropriations: Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of submit testimony Senate Bill 340, An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services.

Renee Chisolm and I am employed as a senior site coordinator at New Reach, Inc., a nonprofit that has been serving the New Haven area for over 30 years. New Reach inspires independence for all people affected by homelessness and poverty through a continuum of housing and support using the most innovative, progressive, equitable and inclusive methods.

I believe my responsibility as a New Reach staff is to advocate, support and help homeless single women and women with children empower themselves, build confidence and self-worth. Strive to help them acquire a job, home in a safe and nurturing environment as well as opening their eyes to the idea of improving their situation through education and self-love. To offer guidance and the ability to have someone to talk to as well as share their thoughts, ideas, and frustrations.

I am here today to respectfully request that state enact a law requiring state agencies to ensure that funding levels for homelessness and housing assistance services reflect the true cost of these professional services, to include, paying competitive wages and benefits to front-line workers who staff shelters, Coordinated Access Network appointments, homeless outreach, and housing navigation and case management services.

Regardless of their essential role homeless and housing services organizations continue to be funded by state agencies at levels far below the actual cost of delivering homeless and housing assistance services. There have been no adjustments to funding levels to reasonably cover inflationary costs and therefore limiting a provider's ability to maintain its ability to administer their programs, these rising costs include such items as employee salaries, training/supervision costs, rent, heat, fuel, and health insurance costs. Please:



1. Require the state to establish an independent, evidence-based process to set rates which reflect the optimal and sustainable costs of operating an emergency crisis response system to serve everyone who experiences a housing crisis.
2. Require the state to establish an independent, evidence-based process to set new rates which reflect the optimal and sustainable costs of the services provided to end homelessness.
3. This review must consider living wages, overtime and hazard pay, fringe and benefits, and other than personnel costs such as supervision, supplies, staff training and professional development, technology administrative support, and more.
4. These standards and revised payment structure should then be revised each biennium based on a review of changes to cost-of-living and other cost changes.
5. Require the Commissioners of DOH, DMHAS, and other housing related funding department to use the revised payment structure and standards as the basis of any new services contracts.

As a Site Coordinator I am an essential worker. I have noticed that we are not always able to provide our residents with the basic, such as daily hygiene products, bus cards {so they have transportation to job/home search}, A computer room that allows them to look, fill out and print applications for apartments and homes. I have noticed that if residents do find an apt, they have trouble with the application fee Security deposit and coming up with the rent. Some of the Residents that enter the shelter come with just the clothes on their backs. It would be nice to be able to offer them the under garments, clothing, coats etc. when needed. It is important to remember that they are people with feelings and should be treated with respect and the worth they have. We should remember that they have much to offer their community and should be given the opportunity to improve their situation to offer the best of themselves.

Non-profit homeless and housing services organizations, and the people who work for them, play a critical role in protecting and assisting Connecticut's most vulnerable populations. During the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, homeless and housing services have played an important part of the state's critical infrastructure and emergency response system.

It has been an honor and blessing to be an Essential Worker. By being an essential worker, I am able to ensure that the women who come to Martha's Place are in a Safe and Secure environment, that they have staff that will support and advocate for them.



These single women are given the ability to rest, gather their thoughts, plan with the help of Caseworkers on how to better themselves and improve their situation. They are allowed the ability to let go of some of the stress that comes with being homeless because now they can find comfort in knowing they have a place to rest and a sense of stability. New Reach has provided COVID-19 Testing {biweekly}, created a quarantine floor to accept new Residents, executed procedures for sanitizing the facility and equipped staff and residents with the necessary PPE needed. They have acquired food, clothing, and hygiene supply donations.

We must prioritize adequate funding to homeless service organizations so that every employer is able to provide their staff with a safe working environment and a living wage. Creating a funding schematic that ensures livable wages and benefits would go a long way towards eliminating the racial and economic inequities that have become so glaring during this pandemic.

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,

Renee Chisolm
Sr. Site Coordinator
New Reach, Inc.