



**Testimony for the Appropriations Committee Public Hearing in support of
Senate Bill 340: An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services
Friday, March 26, 2021**

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Greetings Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and the distinguished members of the Committee on Appropriations. The Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) CT Office thanks you for the opportunity to submit written and oral testimony for the hearing being conducted on Senate Bill 340, An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services.

For over 30 years, CSH has been a leading national non-profit that works with communities across the country to create supportive housing solutions – safe, stable, affordable housing with access to services – to help individuals and families thrive and have positive outcomes. In Connecticut, we work with agency and providers partners to leverage supportive housing as a central platform to help vulnerable individuals facing housing insecurity, including those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, leaving hospitals and other institutions, and grappling with significant barriers like mental illness. CSH firmly believes in the importance of making supportive housing a priority for those who are most vulnerable.

CSH is a member of the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. While our organization is not a provider of direct services for the people we serve, alongside many other partners in the state, we work to provide data and metrics for tracking supportive housing needs, technical assistance and training to providers, lending options for increasing housing development, and leadership as subject matter experts with national institutional knowledge to ensure we are progressing in our mission to end homelessness. Studies have shown that when our CT residents have stable housing, their economic and health outcomes improve. During this COVID-19, permanent housing has provided the safest environment for all of Connecticut's residents, especially the vulnerable and those impacted by racial and equity disparities. This work by frontline workers and providers, who directly support the services that impact those experiencing homelessness during the pandemic, has helped to protect our CT community and they should be funded and compensated fully for their efforts.

Today, I am here 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.

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. Despite of their essential role, homeless and housing services, and organizations continue to be funded by state agencies at levels far below the actual cost of delivering homeless and housing assistance services. For over 10 years, state agencies like the Department of Housing and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services have required homeless and housing services organizations to maintain the same level of services at flat funding levels, essentially reducing the "actual per client or per unit" funding levels. There have been no



adjustments to funding levels to reasonably cover inflationary costs and therefore limiting a provider's ability to properly administer their programs and rising costs such items as employee salaries, training/supervision costs, rent, heat, fuel, and health insurance costs. CSH respectfully requests that the committee support the following proposals and expansions:

- 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 unit 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.

Continued budget cuts and underfunding for services to support homelessness and those facing housing instability has caused a direct slowdown in the creation of affordable housing unit development and has reduced services and efforts to outreach to communities most directly impacted, such as veterans and seniors, foster children and other vulnerable youth, racial minorities, economically impoverished, and the formerly incarcerated. Non-profit homeless and housing services organizations, and the people who work for them, play a critical role in protecting and assisting these most vulnerable populations but they have not been adequately funded for the valuable work and services that they provide. 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 all Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

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