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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

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.

My name is Mildred Thomas and I am a direct care staff at South Park Inn, an emergency shelter, medical respite and transitional housing site serving individuals experiencing homelessness, including veterans. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support if Senate Bill 340, An Act Concerning Funding for Housing Services.

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.

I've been an employee at South Park Inn for over 22 years. Not too long ago I become a full time employee and now I'm working two full time jobs just to make ends meet. Loving the work that I do with the homeless and making sure that they are always safe, takes a toll on me and all staffs. As we work so many hours in this pandemic as front line employees and with clients who have Covid 19 we deserve a better rate of pay.

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. 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 level/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 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 unit rates which reflect the optimal and sustainable costs of the services provided to

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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.

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.

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,

Jose Gonzalez