

February 20, 2009

Health and Hospitals Subcommittee
Appropriations Committee
Connecticut General Assembly

Re: Next Steps Supportive Housing Initiative

To Members of the Committee:

Governor Rell's proposed budget calls for eliminating funding through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services for the creation of new supportive housing through the Next Steps Supportive Housing Initiative. **I urge you to reject this cut in the DMHAS Housing and Support Services line item.** I understand the severe pressures on the State budget, but the State call ill afford to ignore the needs of people with serious mental illness for affordable housing and support. Their needs will not disappear if not appropriately addressed. Instead, their needs will be addressed through much more costly systems – hospital emergency rooms, inpatient psychiatric care, jails, homeless shelters and prisons – that will yield only short term benefits.

I have worked in the field of supportive housing for over sixteen years. I have seen how supportive housing has given men and women with mental illness a chance to regain their lives and health after months or even years of homelessness. I also know that supportive housing cannot be created unless adequate funding is available from the public sector for supportive services and operating subsidies.

Over the past several years, the State of Connecticut's supportive housing work has been lauded as a national model for effective interagency collaboration, and acclaimed for its innovative integration of disparate funding resources. Now, more than ever, is not the time to retreat from this progress, especially in the face of rising homelessness. Instead, this period of economic downturn provides an opportunity to assess how we are providing care for people in need, and look to our supportive housing efforts as a model for how we can cost effectively transform our systems of care.

Right now there are communities across the state with "shovel ready" supportive housing developments that can move forward once this funding is preserved by you. We all stand to gain by enabling these projects to proceed: reduced crisis care for vulnerable people with mental illness; a better functioning behavioral health system; construction jobs, property tax revenues, and economic benefits to local communities from project development; and an end to homelessness for scores of our citizens. It is a small investment that yields substantial results.

Sincerely,

Janice Elliott

Janice L. Elliott
President