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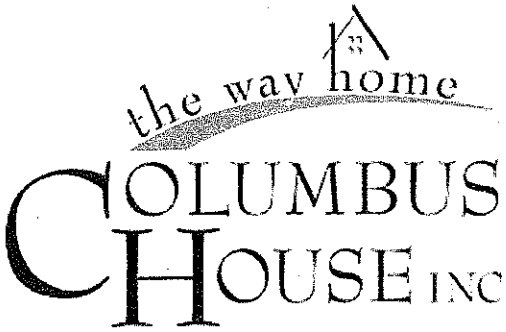

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Testimony of Alison Cunningham, Executive Director

RE: HB No. 5014, An Act Making Adjustments to State Expenditures and Revenues for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2012

Before the Appropriations Committee

February 15, 2012

Senator Harp, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for your time this evening, as in so many evenings past, to hear the testimony of so many of us who are concerned for the well-being of people who are the most vulnerable among us in our State. I am here because of my deep concern for people who are homeless, and I am grateful that you share that concern.

At this time of year, we prepare for the worst in our shelters all across the state, as winter overflow shelters open, churches and synagogues invite people in, and hotels fill up quickly with people who have no other place to go. At the Overflow Shelter in New Haven, last night we had 116 people, well over our legal capacity of 75. At our year round shelter, we had to set up 15 cots for women who have no overflow shelter to go to. Our own family shelter in Middletown received over 500 calls for assistance that we simply could not respond to since we only have 7 units of emergency shelter available to offer. Ours is not an unusual story but is simply an example of what is happening across the state.

Opening Doors CT was released just under a month ago, and under this statewide framework for ending homelessness, we will work on the goal of ending homelessness in the next 5 years for chronic homeless and Veterans, and 10 years for family homelessness and homelessness in general. I believe that the initiatives recently announced by Governor Malloy will support our efforts to address the issues of homelessness more deeply than ever before. With the revitalization of state owned public housing, we have the opportunity to ensure that affordable housing is made available to families and individuals, not only ending homelessness for some but preventing homelessness for people who are at risk.

Many who are homeless need permanent housing with support services attached, and the Governor has included 150 new RAP certificates for scattered site supportive housing. Supportive housing breaks the cycle of homelessness, offers services to help people maintain their housing and enhance their quality of life. Through Columbus House, we now house over 100 people in this type of scattered site housing, including people who have spent years cycling in and out of jails and hospitals. Once housed, they stay housed and begin to rebuild their lives. Scattered site permanent supportive housing is a cost effective and quick way to move people off the streets and out of our shelters into decent, affordable housing.

Finally, what great news to hear the Governor's plan to create an Office of Housing within DECD. The antidote to homelessness begins with housing, and so it only makes sense to have a dedicated Office of Housing that will be focused on housing and economic development. This is a significant move that demonstrates the commitment of this administration to tackle the issues of homelessness and affordable housing, which has the support of advocates across the state.

This is all great news and exciting support but the immediate needs are glaring, and so there are 2 other initiatives for which your support is needed:

As we expand our efforts to prevent homelessness, we need 100 new RAP certificates for families who are already on the wait list for housing assistance. These are families who are already struggling to stay out of shelters, who might be doubled up with other family members, who are the working poor who need an affordable place to live. 100 new RAPS would go a long way toward reducing the demand on family shelters now.

Finally, we need the support of Children in Shelters program which would provide child care so that family members could go back to work, or get the training they need to get the job they deserve. For those who do not qualify for Care 4 Kids, the Children in Shelters program is a critical part of the solution.

Thank you for paying attention to these critical issues. Your support has helped us get where we are today in the mission of ending homelessness. We still need your support to help us reach the day when homelessness is a thing of the past, where everyone in CT has a safe place to call home.
Thank you.