



Joint Public Hearing
January 29, 2013

Testimony of Betsy Crum,
Executive Director, Connecticut Housing Coalition

TO: Chairs and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services and Housing Committees

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today. My name is Betsy Crum, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Housing Coalition. The Connecticut Housing Coalition represents the broad, vibrant network of community-based affordable housing activity across the state. Our more than 250 member organizations include nonprofit developers, human service agencies, resident associations, and diverse other housing practitioners and advocates. Founded in 1981, the Coalition works to expand housing opportunity and to increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing in Connecticut.

I had planned to testify in person today, and would have been here but for a family emergency that has taken me unexpectedly out of state. I have been very pleased to be able to participate as a member of the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing over the past six months, and to have the good fortune of representing our broad membership on that committee. I have also been very fortunate to have the opportunity to collaborate with other members of the Council, which has been so ably and effectively chaired by Anne Foley of the Office of Policy and Management. I greatly look forward to our continued association and work together on the Council as its work moves forward.

The recommendations contained in the Interagency Council's Report represent an important step forward for the State of Connecticut with respect to creating, operating and providing access to affordable housing. The new Department of Housing will provide leadership and vision around housing, and will coordinate the implementation and leveraging of the significant resources committed by the Governor and General Assembly. Its mission - to "provide centralized leadership and a comprehensive approach to eliminating homelessness and meeting the needs of low- and moderate-income individuals, families and communities in Connecticut for quality and sustainable housing by enhancing the supply of, and access to, safe and affordable housing and by collaborating with other agencies to improve the infrastructure of neighborhoods and communities" - is spot-on. I would like to express my strong support for these recommendations, and to highlight several that I think are critical to the long-term success of our state's housing goals.

- Consolidation of some State housing programs: The systems for funding housing and community development have been fragmented and bureaucratic for many years. Recommendations for programs to be transferred into the new Department demonstrate a thoughtful, important step toward better coordination and investment of resources. Consolidating housing production, operating and financing will enhance productivity, maximize leveraging and ensure a more comprehensive approach to meeting housing goals.
- Changes to the State's housing delivery system: The new Department must develop and put in place policies that transform our housing delivery system to focus on comprehensive solutions and outcomes that bring together all available resources to solve housing needs in Connecticut. Transparency, flexibility and predictability are crucial components. If combined with an organizational culture that focuses on housing outcomes, the new Department of Housing can truly transform the way housing is accomplished in Connecticut.
- Enhanced coordination across housing systems: Perhaps the most exciting recommendation is that the new Department of Housing be a true "one-stop" for housing resources in the state. Beyond just the programs transferred, the new Department would take the lead in bringing together all of the state funding that supports housing to meet local and community needs. Housing providers and consumers would have access to funding from the various resource "pots" rather than chasing after isolated programs. This change could truly transform the way housing is delivered in Connecticut.

With a new Department of Housing that is able to coordinate the resources at hand and is lead by a vision of providing the highest quality housing, the Connecticut Housing Coalition stands ready to be a full partner in the business of creating, managing and preserving affordable housing in our state.

Thank you for your consideration.
