



*Testimony before the Appropriations, Human Services and Housing  
Committees*

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Good afternoon Senators Harp, Slossberg and Bartolomeo, Representatives Walker, Abercrombie and Butler and distinguished members of the Appropriations, Human Services and Housing Committees. I am Claudette Beaulieu, Deputy Commissioner for Programs at the Department of Social Services. I am here today to testify in support of the final report developed by the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing as required by Public Act 12-1 of the June 2012 Special Session.

The Department of Social Services currently funds and coordinates many housing programs for low-income individuals. Accordingly, we were appointed to serve on the Interagency Council on which we actively participated at all scheduled meetings. The interactive and open process enabled a broad range of stakeholders to present successful agency consolidations, necessary principles to ensure adequate safe housing, concerns and recommendations. The Interagency Council listened and deliberated in a very open and professional manner to complete the report dated January 15, 2013.

I am here today to affirm the department's full commitment to the recommendations included in Section IV. We are prepared to work with the new leadership at the Department of Housing (DOH) to ensure a successful transition of the department programs listed in Section IV. However, our work will not end once the programs are transitioned. We will continue as an active partner with our colleagues on the Interagency Council for Supportive Housing. We will collaborate with DOH leadership and staff to ensure that low-income clients served by our department continue to access housing services throughout the state.

State-funded DSS programs that will transfer to the new housing department include the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), Residences for Persons with AIDS, Emergency Shelters for Homeless, Housing/Mediation Services, Rent Bank, Transitional Living, and the Security Deposit Guarantee Program. Federally-funded programs such as the Section 8 Housing Voucher program and the Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS will also transfer from DSS to DOH.

With regard to Section 8 and RAP, DSS is responsible for supporting nearly 7,000 Connecticut families with housing subsidies via a statewide contractor. Section 8 and RAP families do not visit or otherwise interact with DSS regional offices for their housing subsidy services as they do for other services such as Medicaid and SNAP. Rather, housing assistance is accessed directly through our contracted vendor. This interface is not expected to change under DOH. DSS has extended the length of its contract with the vendor in order to ensure that there is a smooth transition to DOH.

Other current DSS programs such as emergency shelters, transitional living programs, AIDS residences and eviction prevention programs are all services that are provided through community-based agencies via contracts. These contracts will also transfer to DOH.

Coordinating the state's housing functions has several advantages over the existing, fragmented system. First, it is more consumer-friendly and will be considerably easier to navigate for potential and existing clients. Under the current system, DSS administers the state's Rental Assistance Program, but DECD operates the state's Elderly Rental Assistance Program, OPM administers the Elderly/Disabled Renters' Rebate Program and DCF provides rental assistance subsidies to certain families. This disjointed system can be confusing to state residents in need of housing assistance.

The report issued by the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing presents sound rationale to consolidate similar housing-related programs into one entity. By doing this, clients' ability to find their way to needed support will be enhanced. For example, with the responsibility for homeless shelters, transitional living, and permanent affordable housing options all under one "roof," policies and programs can focus on a continuum of needs.

We applaud the work and efforts of fellow Council colleagues and look forward to assisting with the development of the new Department of Housing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and I welcome any questions you may have.