CONNECTICUT COALITION to
END HOMELESSNESS 257 Lawrence Street, Hartford CT 06106 |P (860) 721-7876| F (860) 257-1148 | www.cceh.org

Testimony of Lisa P. Sementilli, Deputy Director

Before the Appropriations, Housing and Human Services Committees

RE: Interagency Council on Affordable Housing Report and Recommendations

January 29, 2013

Senator Harp, Representative Walker, members of the Appropriations, Housing and Human Services Committees, thank you for hearing my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, and thank you for your leadership in preventing and ending homelessness in Connecticut.

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness enthusiastically supports the report of the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing, calling for the creation of a state level Department of Housing.

The Department of Housing will *provide centralized leadership* by consolidating and coordinating housing resources and policy—creating new opportunities to better leverage our resources, while making it easier to eliminate unnecessary barriers to getting those resources out to those who can make the best use of them.

The Department will *provide a comprehensive approach to eliminating homelessness* in our State. Connecticut's emergency shelters have run at or over 100% of their legal capacity for more than two years. More than 13,000 persons (and this includes children) used our emergency and transitional housing programs last year.

The new Department of Housing will *meet the needs of low- and moderate-income individuals, families and communities in Connecticut by enhancing the supply of and access to safe and affordable housing.* Our statewide data shows that far more families and individuals experience housing instability and homelessness at any one time than can be served by our fragile prevention and crisis response system -- *an estimated 40,000 families are "doubled up" (staying with family or friend for economic reasons) in Connecticut.*

The coordination of shelters, transitional housing and supportive service programs which comprise the *housing crisis response system* through this consolidation is also an important opportunity to redefine our strategies to end homelessness based on an economic development and income security paradigm where housing emergencies and the crisis of homelessness can be solved through the creation of affordable housing and jobs.

In closing, I'm reminded that today is also our statewide point in time count of persons who are homeless. Dozens of human service professionals and volunteers will be outside in most of our cities and towns tonight to identify, survey and potentially connect into services hundreds of individuals and families who don't have a place of their own to call home. We know that

homelessness is a housing crisis. It is also a crisis fueled by inadequate income and financial resources. This connection—between housing *availability* and *affordability*—is what this new Department of Housing will effectively create and deploy on behalf of our most vulnerable citizens.