



Joint Committee on Appropriations, February 11, 2014

Testimony of Howard Rifkin, Partnership for Strong Communities, on the Department of Housing Budget Proposal

My name is Howard Rifkin. I'm the Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to preventing and ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and creating strong communities.

I am submitting this testimony in support of the Governor's budget proposal for the Department of Housing, and on behalf of his commitment to end homelessness among Veterans by the end of 2015. I do so on behalf of the Partnership and from the perspective of having worked on housing issues in this state for over 30 years and as a representative of State Treasurer Denise Nappier on CHFA for twelve years. I'm also a member of the Interagency Council on Affordable Housing.

Specifically, the Partnership strongly supports the following resources:

- Housing subsidies for 110 additional units of scattered site supportive housing (\$1.1 million)
- An additional \$650,000 in rapid re-housing resources from current year appropriations
- An additional \$1 million for Rental Assistance from current year appropriations, which could support an additional 100+ units of deeply affordable housing
- Two new positions in the Department of Housing to provide technical assistance to housing authorities
- Tax relief for Elderly Renters Program, which includes \$6.5 million to reopen intake
- A commitment to end chronic homelessness among veterans by the end of 2015, which includes:
 - A veterans' Opportunity program including a statewide coordinator to manage the complex network of employment services for veterans, and \$600,000 for grants to area housing agencies for employment specialists to work with veterans
 - \$500,000 to begin work on additional housing for veterans on the campus of the Department of Veterans' Affairs in Rocky Hill
 - A priority to veterans for security deposit guarantees and \$50,000 to increase availability of security deposit assistance for homeless veterans

And while not before this committee A Capital Budget request of \$7 million, which will support transit oriented development including a commitment to mixed income housing at station stops, which is in the Office of Policy and Management





The Partnership staffs and manages the Reaching Home campaign, a public-private partnership to implement Opening Doors-CT, a statewide framework to prevent and end homelessness based on the federal Opening Doors plan. The primary focus of the campaign is on people who are chronically homeless, veterans, families with children, and youth. Over 3,000 people experienced chronic homelessness in 2013. Overwhelming evidence links permanent supportive housing to stability and success for vulnerable individuals and families who are chronically homeless. Permanent supportive housing is proven to reduce the use of high cost public services like emergency rooms, prisons, and nursing homes. Connecticut needs 650 new units of permanent supportive housing a year to solve chronic homelessness by 2017. 110 new units of scattered site permanent supportive housing are a critical advancement toward meeting this need.

A major driver of homelessness in Connecticut is the economic hardship families are facing right now and the severe lack of affordable housing. Many are unable to support themselves and their children. We have the 2nd highest wealth disparity ranking in the nation with one of the highest housing wages (at least \$23 per hour to afford a modest two bedroom apartment). We were 50th in units built per capita between 2003 and 2012, and have an over 90,000 unit shortage of affordable and available rental homes for those at the lowest income threshold (at or below 30% of Area Median Income). We also have close to 100,000 households who are severely cost burdened by their housing (earning at or below 30% of AMI and spending more than 50% of it on rent and utilities).

The lack of housing that is affordable to CT residents at the lower end of the affordability spectrum prevents creates gridlock in the systems meant to serve them. It prevents both transitions from permanent supportive housing to independence and rapid exits from shelter for families with children. This is what makes the Governor's proposed investments in rapid re-housing and deeply affordable so essential. Based on our experience in Connecticut, three years after rapidly re-housing families who are homeless, including victims of domestic violence, 95% of families have not returned to a Connecticut shelter.

Homelessness is expensive. Please help us to invest in long term solutions.

Thank you very much.