



Joint Committee on Appropriations, March 6, 2015
Testimony of Alicia Woodsby, Partnership for Strong Communities, on the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Budget

Good afternoon, chairs and members of the Joint Committee of Appropriations. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I'm the Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities, a statewide nonprofit policy advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness and expanding affordable housing to strengthen Connecticut communities. The Partnership staffs and manages two statewide campaigns – Reaching Home and HomeConnecticut focused on these goals, respectively.

The Partnership supports the investments in supportive housing and services for people who are chronically homeless in the proposed budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Most specifically, we are in **strong support of the \$1 million in fiscal 2016 and \$2 million in fiscal 2017 for DMHAS services to support a total of 200 new units of supportive housing related to the Governor's Second Chance Initiative – the Connecticut Collaborative on Re-Entry** (formally known as FUSE) to serve those who frequently cycle through the criminal justice system and homeless shelter services. These services will be paired with the proposed **\$1 million in fiscal 2016 and \$2 million in fiscal 2017 for the Department of Housing for rental subsidies for these units**. We are also in **strong support of the \$1 million in each year for wraparound services for individuals who are chronically homeless as part of the Governor's Zero:2016 initiative**.

Connecticut's Reaching Home Campaign kicked off in 2004 with an extremely ambitious mission to end chronic homelessness in a decade. The effort was focused on those who had been homeless the longest and had a mental illness or other serious disability—vulnerable individuals often at risk of dying on the streets. Ten years later, Connecticut is in a position to be the first state to end Veteran and chronic homelessness using a strategic approach that involves supportive housing and follows the federal Opening Doors plan.

Providing homes for people who have been homeless has saved the state and its municipalities millions of dollars by reducing the use of hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and other temporary, costly responsesⁱ

Connecticut Collaborative on Re-Entry (CCR), known as FUSE, has been a successful collaboration between state intermediaries, government agencies and philanthropies to target those who are chronically homeless and at risk of chronic homelessness. Using a data match between homeless and criminal justice system data, FUSE (Frequent Users) targets and provides supportive housing to men and women who cycle through the homeless service and corrections systems. The total lifetime cost for jail and shelter services for the first 30 men and women was more than \$12 million. Early outcomes showed that participants housed for 12 months or more experienced a 99% decline in shelters days and a 73% decrease in jail episodes.

Philanthropies, government agencies, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing's Social Innovation Fund are currently testing a similar approach, matching homeless data and Medicaid data to target high-cost Medicaid beneficiaries who are also in the homeless system. As of June 2014, 69 people were housed through the initiative. With spending of roughly \$76,000 per person in Medicaid benefits in the previous 12 months, these 69 people accounted for \$5.2 million in Medicaid costs over the last year. The average adult Medicaid beneficiary costs about \$7,000 per year.

The Governor's Zero:2016 Initiative is part of a national effort to get us to the finish line for ending chronic and Veteran homelessness by the end of 2016 and 2015, respectively – making it rare, brief and non-recurring for these populations. We are currently on track for meeting these goals. Years of wise and strategic investments by state policymakers are a major factor in getting us to this point. The wraparound services dollars proposed in the DMHAS



budget can be paired with subsidized rental units proposed in the Governor's Homelessness Prevention and Response bond fund to create the scattered site supportive housing desperately needed for this population. We need your support to prevent a backslide at this critical juncture for the state. Addressing the most vulnerable and difficult to serve will open up capacity and allow us to heighten our focus on other populations struggling with housing such as families with children and unaccompanied youth.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. Investments proposed through the Governor's budget for supportive housing will save public resources and help families and individuals, including Veterans, transition to housing, stability, and hope.

¹ Arthur Andersen, *Connecticut Supportive Housing Demonstration Program* (University of Pennsylvania Health System, Department of Psychiatry, Center for Mental Health Policy and Services Research, 2002).