

**Testimony for Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly
February 10, 2016 Hearing on Conservation and Development
By Lisa Tepper Bates, Executive Director
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for hearing my testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH). I am proud to speak before you today, representing more than 75 member agencies across the state of Connecticut working to provide shelter and end homelessness for our neighbors in need.

The current cold temperatures remind us of the urgency of our task – to make homelessness in Connecticut rare, safe, and brief. Winter weather is hard on all of us, but it presents a particularly severe challenge for the children, women, and men in our state who have no home to shield them from the cold.

The good news is this: working closely in partnership with the Department of Housing and United Way of Connecticut's 2-1-1 helpline, emergency shelters across the state have done heroic work to make shelter available to those in need. Under the Department of Housing's leadership, Connecticut's creation of a Coordinated Access system is allowing us to optimize our use of existing homeless response resources. While our emergency shelters remain at (or above) capacity, we are doing better than ever to identify and meet the needs of all those facing homelessness, and to help them move quickly into stable housing.

With the support of the Governor and the legislature, we are making real progress on ending homelessness for the people of Connecticut, and for the bottom line of our budget. Reducing the amount of homeless in our communities relieves the cost that it forces on our public systems, including emergency services, hospitals, and schools.

This is not a one-time effort: the coordinated response system we are building must be maintained to meet the needs of Connecticut residents who fall into housing crisis this year, next year, and beyond. **Cuts to the resources available for this effort would risk reversing the important progress we have made, forcing rates of homelessness again upward – increasing damage to human lives, and increasing the heavy and unnecessary costs to our taxpayers.**

Homelessness is a costly problem, in the toll it takes on human lives, and the toll it takes on public resources. We know what works to end homelessness – through coordinated efforts to secure the right housing and supports, we can resolve homelessness – one person, one family at a time. The net gain to those we serve, to our communities, and to our state is clear: it costs more to allow homelessness to persist than it does to resolve it.

For Connecticut residents, who struggle with disabling conditions like severe mental illness and have lived for years on our streets – those we refer to as “chronically homeless” – providing housing and support is the **right** thing to do. But it’s also the **smart** thing to do. Numerous studies show that housing those who have been chronically homeless allows communities to save up to 70% of the costs they otherwise incur through unnecessary emergency service calls, emergency room visits and hospital stays, repeated incarceration, and like costs.

Providers of homeless services are working harder than ever before to coordinate their efforts in each community. They are eliminating duplication of services, and making every dollar count. Combined with strategic investments by our state partners, including the Department of Housing and the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, we are making significant progress in reducing the homelessness in Connecticut:

- Connecticut became the first state in the nation to end chronic homelessness (or the long term homelessness of people with disabilities) among veterans.
- Connecticut is on track to end chronic homelessness of all populations across our state by the end of this year – we saw a 30% decline from 2014 to 2015.
- The number of people experiencing homelessness and the number of episodes of homelessness in Connecticut is falling every year – due to enhanced efforts by providers to resolve homelessness before those in need must seek shelter, and by helping those who exit homelessness to remain stably housed.

We have gained every inch of this ground by forging coordination at a level uncommon in social services or for nonprofits. We are putting the client first, and at the center of a system – with service providers from different agencies working as a seamless team in each community to meet each client’s needs from the front door of shelter through appropriate housing and supports. Some clients need little help to get back on their feet. Some will need more supports, if they are to remain housed and healthy. We are working hard to target the right resources to each client, to avoid waste and to maximize impact.

With all this in mind, I respectfully request your support for the carefully targeted additional resources needed to ensure that we can maintain this important momentum. Through the work of more than 70 providers in the Reaching Home Campaign, we have worked together to identify the areas of most need, and ask for your support of specific resources to fill critical gaps.

- We ask for your support to fund the 150 units of permanent supportive housing that we need to complete the effort to house all those experiencing chronic homelessness in our state by the end of this year, through a proposed investment of \$1.5 million for rental subsidies and \$1.125 million for services in FY 17.
- We ask you to provide a critical investment of \$747,000 in FY 2017 for additional funds to support Coordinated Access Network (CAN) coordination during this critical start-up phase.
- We ask that you support our request for \$2 million in FY 2017 for Rapid Re-Housing – targeted, short-term services that will help many in need to exit homelessness to housing and increase their chances of remaining stably housed.
- We ask that you support additional resources of \$2 million in FY 2017 for crisis response and housing supports for youth and young adults, who live every day in particular vulnerability, on their own, without proper shelter and support.

We understand that, in these tough times, you have many difficult choices to make.

Please know that nonprofit providers of homeless services are working hard to stretch our resources, working together like never before. Investing in ending homelessness is a smart use of public resources that prevents needless human suffering and avoids wasteful public spending – it is an investment that pays dividends across our communities in a way few other investments can equal. At the same time, reversal of our progress to end homelessness would be felt broadly, from hospitals to schools and other community services.

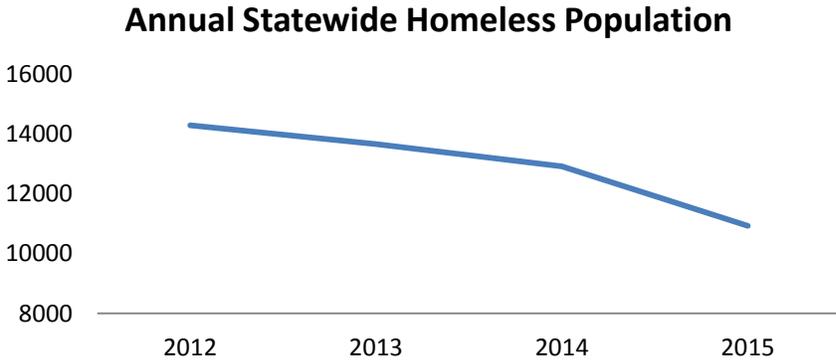
Thank you for your time. Thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Lisa Tepper Bates
Executive Director
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness

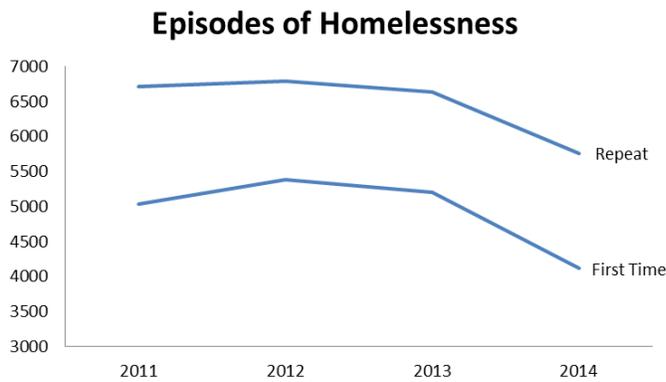
Achievements on the Way to Ending Homelessness – Let’s Keep Up the Momentum by Maintaining Critical Investments in Homeless Services!

Lower total numbers of people homeless every year in recent years...



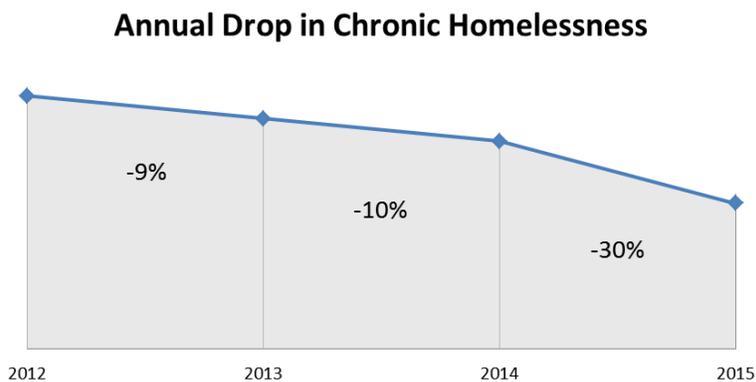
Source: CT Homeless Management and Information System (HMIS) FY2015-2015

Lower numbers of people becoming homeless for the first time, and lower numbers of people becoming homeless again...



Source: CT HMIS FY2011-FY2014

And a significant decrease in chronic homelessness...



Source: CT HMIS FY2012-FY2015