



P.O. Box 7093
586 Ella T. Grasso Boulevard
New Haven, CT 06519
Administrative Office: 203.401.4400 x 106
Fax: 203.773.1430
www.columbushouse.org

To: Members of the Appropriations Committee
From: Alison Cunningham, Executive Director
Re: Dept of Housing budget
Date: February 10, 2016

Thank you to the members of the Appropriation Committee for your time today. My name is Alison Cunningham. I'm the Executive Director of Columbus House, an agency that provides services and housing for people who are homeless in our state. Our primary areas of service are in the New Haven region and the Middlesex, Meriden, Wallingford region.

This past summer, the Governor announced that Connecticut had ended chronic homelessness for Veterans, and we are the first state in the country to have done so. That is a significant milestone for our state, and sets the pace for us to continue in our efforts to end chronic homelessness in general.

A person is verified as chronically homeless if he/she has been homeless for 12 months and lives with a disability, i.e. mental illness, substance use, chronic medical conditions. We know that people who fit this definition make inappropriate use of emergency systems and institutions, such as hospital emergency rooms, jails/prisons, mental health institutions. Cycling through these systems is not only costly to the institutions and to the state, but does not resolve a person's homelessness.

In the past 12 months, advocates and non-profit providers across the state have worked diligently to "re-tool" the system of care for people who are homeless. With significant funding support from the state, including the Dept of Housing, we have closed gaps in this system so that people are far less likely to fall through the cracks. To that end, we have bolstered our partnerships with providers across regions in the newly instituted Coordinated Access Networks. These eight networks create centralized systems within 8 distinct regions or CANs for people to enter shelter and then to exit homelessness into housing that fits their needs. The agencies within each CAN have designed new processes so that people who are homeless now face far fewer barriers to get into housing, streamlining the process and reducing the time it takes to move from the streets/shelter into more appropriate, permanent housing.

This retooling work has helped us leverage new resources within the CAN. Specifically for the Greater New Haven CAN, the United Way of Greater New Haven has bought into our work, literally, by investing their own staff time and additional financial resources for new staff that support the coordination of our efforts. Yale New Haven Hospital is also contributing significant social work staff time to participate in the CAN in order to provide more appropriate discharge planning for their patients. And each organization participating in the CAN contributes staff time

over and above their normal job descriptions to do what it takes make this new system of care work.

We know that these significant system changes will help us reach our goal of ending chronic homelessness by the end of this calendar year. And that is why, as a state, we have joined the movement of **ZERO: 2016**, a national campaign intent on reaching that same goal. We know we can accomplish this, as evidenced by the fact that we have done so for chronically homeless veterans. Now, we will continue on with our success, striving to reach the end of chronic homelessness for individuals and families by the end of this calendar year.

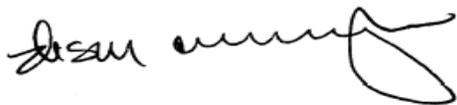
We can show success toward this goal in the 2015 the Point in Time Count, the annual count of all homeless people, which showed the number of chronically homeless was down by 21% from the prior year. Our success thus far is, in large part, due to the great commitment to this effort by the Governor, the legislature and both the Dept of Housing and the Dept of Mental Health and Addiction Services. New funding for systems changes and for targeted interventions have been the keys to our achievements in the past year.

That is why it is critical to maintain current funding for the work in place, for CAN support and for targeted housing interventions. Any cuts to these resources will not only undermine our work, but would risk a reversal in the progress shown to date.

Further, to reach this audacious and doable goal of ending chronic homelessness by the end of 2016, we need new funding to expand permanent supportive housing for this population as well as those who are on the cusp of becoming chronic. We are asking for \$1.5m for rental subsidies and \$1.125m for services to support people who are housed. We need \$747,000 in support of the Coordinated Access Networks (CAN). And we need \$2m for Rapid Re-Housing, a proven solution to help people get out of shelters and into housing quickly.

This is a difficult budget year, as we all know. We all also know that continued investment in upfront strategies will help reduce costs in the long run. When people are housed, their use of costly emergency and institutional care is greatly reduced. But the critical issue here is the fact that we are saving lives of the most disenfranchised, chronically homeless folks in our communities. That in itself is worth the investment.

Thank you for your time tonight. I am happy to answer any questions.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alison Cunningham", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Alison Cunningham
Executive Director
Columbus House, Inc.
203-401-4400, ext. 105
acunningham@columbushouse.org