

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut
Before the Appropriations Committee
February 10, 2016**

**Department of Housing (DOH) budget cuts and changes
in Governor's proposed Midterm Budget Adjustments FY2017
H.B. No. 5044 AN ACT MAKING ADJUSTMENTS TO STATE EXPENDITURES FOR THE
FISCAL YEAR ENDING JUNE 30, 2017**

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Daniela Giordano and I am the Public Policy Director with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut. NAMI Connecticut is the state affiliate of NAMI, the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for all those affected by mental health conditions. NAMI Connecticut offers support groups, educational programs, and advocacy for individuals' and families' quality of life in the community. We represent individuals who live with mental health conditions and parents and family members of individuals living with mental health conditions. I am writing to you today on behalf of NAMI Connecticut to comment on the budget as it relates to the Department of Housing.

We understand that Connecticut finds itself in a very difficult budget climate, which will require difficult decisions by legislators and the executive branch. At the same time, what is important to note and pay attention to is the fact that Connecticut has been making significant progress towards our common goal of ending homelessness in Connecticut, through the support of many players, specifically Governor Malloy, the Legislature, the Departments of Housing and Mental Health and Addiction Services, and coordinated community efforts:

- Connecticut became the first state in the nation recognized by the federal government for **ending chronic homelessness among Veterans** in 2015.
- Connecticut is **on track in the Zero: 2016 Campaign to end chronic homelessness** (the long-term homelessness of people with severe disabilities) by the end of this year.
- The 2015 Point-in-Time (PIT) count (annual census of homelessness) showed **the lowest number of homeless counted in CT since the first count in 2007**.
- **Unsheltered homelessness was down 32% since 2013 PIT count.**
- **Chronic homelessness decreased by 21% from the 2014 PIT count.**

We are making great strides toward ending all forms of homelessness in Connecticut, improving the lives of those who have experienced homelessness and improving our communities that have struggled with this issue. In order to maintain this positive momentum, **we are asking for the support of the Administration and the Legislature for the investments in effective solutions.**

The Reaching Home Campaign, of which NAMI Connecticut is an active member organization, is the campaign to build the political and civic will to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. Reaching Home's vision is that no one should experience homelessness and that no one should be without a safe, stable place to call home. It is a diverse coalition working across systems as well as sectors, such as housing, health, education, job training, and food insecurity. Its Steering Committee includes representatives from various constituencies, including advocates & intermediaries, government, local planning bodies, people experiencing homelessness, providers of housing and services; philanthropy and private sector, institutions, and faith communities.

Reaching Home's shared legislative agenda is pursuing specific goals in order to continue this progress. One recommendation we want to highlight is particularly relevant and important to individuals with mental health conditions – **expansion of Supportive Housing** for individuals who have high health needs and experience chronic homelessness. Permanent Supportive Housing (affordable independent housing with supportive services) continues to be the most effective housing model to assist people with high needs and those experiencing chronic homelessness and is proven to cut system costs by up to 70%. **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 responses.**¹

Reaching Home recommends \$1.5 million for rental subsidies and \$1.125 million for services in FY17 for 150 new units of scattered site supportive housing *in order to reach the goal of ending chronic homelessness in the state.* **Rental subsidies** come from the Department of Housing (DOH), while the **services** funding comes from the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

Supporting people to live successfully in the most integrated setting, the community, provides not only for individuals' basic need of being able to call a place home, but also brings hope for a better future. It is also a springboard for individuals to be able to take care of their health and wellbeing and move toward economic and civic engagement in their communities.

Thank you for your time and attention. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Respectfully,

Daniela Giordano, MSW
Public Policy Director
NAMI Connecticut

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).