



Joint Committee on Finance, Revenue and Bonding
February 26, 2016
Testimony of Alicia Woodsby, Partnership for Strong Communities, on SB 11

Good morning, Senators Fonfara and Frantz, Representatives Berger and Davis, and members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I'm the Executive Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities (Partnership), a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness and expanding affordable housing to strengthen Connecticut communities. To meet these goals, the Partnership staffs and manages two statewide campaigns – Reaching Home and HOMEConnecticut.

I'm here today to testify in support of SB 11, An Act Authorizing and Adjusting Bonds of the State for Capital Improvements, Transportation and Other Purposes. Specifically, the Partnership supports the preservation of the bond funds for the Housing Trust Fund, the Homelessness Prevention and Response Fund, and the Housing Development and Rehabilitation Fund at the Department of Housing, as well as the new bond funding proposed for transit-oriented development and predevelopment activities at the Office of Policy and Management. These are critical resources for expanding affordable housing and preventing and ending homelessness in Connecticut.

In 2012, Connecticut's Reaching Home Campaign launched the implementation of Opening Doors – CT, the statewide plan to prevent and end homelessness that follows the federal Opening Doors plan. Opening Doors CT has engaged more than two hundred stakeholders including government and community partners, providers, advocates and policymakers, to work collectively to meet the following core goals:

- Finishing the job of ending veteran and chronic homelessness by the end of 2016
- Preventing and ending homelessness among families with children and youth by the end of 2022
- Setting a path to end all forms of homelessness

The Homelessness Prevention and Response Fund will create rapid re-housing resources and scattered site supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness in our state. These resources are vital to our ability to end chronic homelessness. Rapid Re-Housing quickly connects individuals and families who fall into homelessness back into housing by providing a time-limited subsidy to lower barrier households. Building adequate capacity for Rapid Re-Housing is central to laying the foundation for the success of Coordinated Access, which depends on the exit of clients to housing, so that emergency shelter space can be made available for new clients in urgent need. Connecticut is creating a system to end homelessness, and has made substantial headway for Veterans and the long term homelessness of people with disabilities (chronic homelessness). In fact, the federal government confirmed this month that Connecticut has effectively ended homelessness among Veterans in our state. Connecticut became the first state in the nation recognized by the federal government for ending chronic homelessness among Veterans in August 2015.



These are powerful examples of how local, state, and federal leaders can come together to solve complex problems. Through the unprecedented support of Governor Malloy, the Legislature, and the Departments of Housing and Mental Health and Addiction Services, we are now on track to end all chronic homelessness in our state. Through incredible collaboration across the state, we reduced chronic homelessness by 30% from 2014-2015. We will need the scattered site supportive housing units from this fund to finish the job on chronic homelessness and maintain it. Ending homelessness does not mean that no one will ever experience a housing crisis again. We are creating an effective system to manage that crisis, but the overall lack of affordable housing options in our state persists.

That is why the development funds utilized from the Housing Trust Fund and the Housing Development and Rehabilitation Fund (Flex Funds) are so critical. Connecticut ranks 6th in the nation in median monthly housing costs, and has the 8th highest “housing wage” in the nation at \$24.29/hour (to afford a typical two bedroom apartment on the state). Half of the state’s renters and 34% of homeowners are “burdened” by their housing costs, paying 30% or more of their income for housing. The Department of Housing (DOH) is working incredibly hard to address the severe shortage and lack of investment in housing from prior Administrations. DOH has leveraged these dollars to create nearly 8,000 new units of affordable housing in the state, many in partnership with the CT Housing and Finance Authority.

We at the Partnership also strongly support funding for transit-oriented development (TOD) and predevelopment activities. TOD projects will allow the state and its municipalities to leverage the significant investments Connecticut has made in mass transit so it can attain its full value. Integral to that success is ensuring low- and moderate-income households are considered in the TOD process so that they can gain access to jobs, services, education, and healthcare. When a household is within 1/2 mile of transit, their transportation costs can be as low as 9%, as compared to households that are not near transit, whose transit costs can reach 24% of their household income. This 15% difference provides a significant increase in household income available for daily necessities, ever more essential for Connecticut’s low- and moderate-income families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.