Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michael Santoro and I am the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Housing (DOH). Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony before you regarding Governor Lamont’s biennial budget.

DOH is committed to its mission of a Connecticut where affordable housing, in strong, vibrant, and inclusive communities, is accessible to individuals and families across the state and homelessness is a thing of the past. The Department’s many programs are aimed at addressing the needs of very low, low, and moderate income individuals and families. As you may be aware, the Department provides funding for housing assistance for families and individuals, programs to preserve our existing stock of affordable housing, as well as capital funding for new development opportunities. Said another way, our programs provide a range of services from ensuring that our state’s most vulnerable individuals have shelter, to providing gap funding for affordable rental housing preservation and development, as well as providing affordable home ownership opportunities for individuals and families ready to set down roots in a community. Governor Lamont’s proposed budget for DOH demonstrates his commitment and support of the agency’s mission.

Connecticut is a nationally recognized leader for its efforts to prevent and end homelessness, and I have seen these transformations occur. When people transition out of homelessness, and into stable housing, it results in cost savings all across state government, ensuring that we are maximizing precious taxpayer resources. Our success speaks for itself, Connecticut was the
first state in the nation to end chronic veteran homelessness, one of only three states to effectively end veteran homelessness, and the only state who has matched all identified chronically homelessness individuals to housing opportunities.

The Governor’s budget preserves crucial services within DOH. This will ensure that we can continue to meet our mission of expanding access to affordable housing while preventing and ending homelessness. The creation of the Housing Supports line item, specifically for the Community Investment Account (CIA), provides stability for our Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) through greater transparency and accountability. The recommended budget also provides increases in the Housing and Homeless Services line item. Specifically, Governor Lamont’s budget provides funding to support rental assistance for the state’s long term care rebalancing strategy and to implement a Medicaid supportive housing program for high-cost, high-need individuals. Consistent with our “housing first” model, these changes expand our ability to provide necessary housing opportunities to our most vulnerable citizens while also achieving savings in Medicaid.

The Department of Housing supports the recommended biennial budget submitted to you by Governor Lamont. I thank you for your time and I, along with members of the Department’s staff, stand ready to answer any questions you may have regarding the budget before you today.