TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
FEBRUARY 27, 2019

REGARDING: HB 7148. AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2021, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR. [Specifically, Appropriations regarding the Department of Housing ]

Senator Osten, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I’m the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order which mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community. I’m also the Co-Chair of the Keep the Promise Coalition (KTP). KTP is a coalition of advocates (people living with mental health conditions, family members, mental health professionals and interested community members) with a vision of a state in which people with mental health conditions are able to live successfully in the community because they have access to housing and other community-based supports and services that are recovery oriented, person-driven and holistic in their approach to wellness. Lastly, I’m a member of the steering committee of the Connecticut Cross Disability Lifespan Alliance, an alliance of people of all ages with all disabilities who pursue a unified agenda.
We join our fellow advocates in supporting budget allocations that will enable Connecticut to continue on the path of reducing homelessness. We must acknowledge this state’s success in ending homelessness among veterans [which doesn’t mean that no veteran will ever be homeless again, but instead that should veterans become homeless, their housing situation is addressed and resolved within a brief period of time so that it doesn’t recur] and reducing chronic homelessness. If this state is to be successful in addressing youth and family homelessness, and the lack of affordable and accessible housing options for people with disabilities, we must continue to invest in evidence-based systems and processes that have been demonstrated to work.

We support the following investments in the Governor’s proposed budget:

- **$79.4 million in FY 20 and $84.8 million in FY 21 in the DOH Housing/Homeless Services line.** This represents preservation of the funding for the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), and for frontline homeless services, outreach, and emergency shelters. The implementation of a new **Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit for High Cost/High Need Individuals**, which could be a true game-changer when it comes to addressing homelessness for the 850 people with disabilities and chronic illnesses who would be served under this program.

- **Supportive housing** is critical to better health outcomes for the clients CLRP serves. When low-income people living with mental health conditions are able to access and maintain housing, they are better able to maintain their recovery. When they are not able to afford housing, the result can be significantly more costly in terms of state spending on their health care when they over-utilize more expensive emergency rooms, inpatient hospitalizations, detox programs, nursing homes and other high-cost crisis services.

- The Coordinated Access Network is the entry point to the homeless service system. The new line item in the DOH budget called **Homeless Supports** provides $2.48 million for the Coordinated Access Network infrastructure including the 2-1-1 housing unit.
• The **Homeless Youth** line item provides $2.3 million for youth outreach services, crisis housing for youth, and other housing services and supports. These funds are critical to Connecticut’s efforts to address homelessness among unaccompanied youth.

Connecticut must be a state which provides opportunity for all its residents. There is a reason that housing is at the base of the pyramid of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. When someone is unable to fulfill their basic need for shelter, it is nearly impossible to maintain the motivation to achieve other goals.

Thank you for considering the testimony I offer here today as you make your decisions about the budget.