Testimony of Raphael L. Podolsky
Appropriations Committee – Department of Housing budget
Public hearing – February 27, 2019

We urge appropriate funding in three specific areas related to the Department of Housing’s budget.

* Moderate Rental public housing PILOT program: Sixteen towns have State-financed family public housing, which, notwithstanding the name “moderate rental,” serves primarily very low-income families. These include developments such as Fairfield Ridge in Danbury, Rockwood Acres in Middletown, and Meadowview Manor in Stratford. Unlike federally-financed public housing, there is no operating subsidy, so revenues must come from tenant rents. Under C.G.S. 8-71, towns can force housing authorities to make “payments in lieu of taxes” (PILOT payments), even though housing authorities are tax exempt. To prevent base rent increases, which would drive the lowest-income residents out of this essential housing, the state for decades made the PILOT payments under C.G.S. 8-216(b). Since 2015, when the state budget eliminated these payments, the legislature has placed and extended a moratorium on towns imposing these charges, which will end June 30 unless extended. The Appropriations Committee should either re-fund this program (H.B. 6356), make the moratorium permanent (H.B. 7228), or, at the very least, extend the moratorium.

* RAP/interdistrict Open Choice program: The Appropriations Committee should provide funding for a small pilot program within the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) to give families with children in interdistrict Open Choice school programs an opportunity to obtain a RAP certificate to make it affordable for such a family to live in the town in which their child is already going to school. Open Choice programs result from the very different residential demographics of towns within the same region. This proposal would address this issue directly and would allow the state to assess the demand for such an opportunity. See H.B. 5841, H.B. 6074, and H.B. 6077.

* Homeless prevention programs: The Department of Housing has played a pivotal role in reducing or eliminating chronic homelessness and homelessness among veterans. It is time to put more focus on preventing the loss of housing that leads to homelessness. This should be reflected in enhanced funding for eviction prevention programs (e.g., the Rent Bank, which helps prevent evictions) and for the expansion of the “general” portion of the RAP program, for which thousands of families have applied for the waiting list.