TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF FUNDING FOR THE CONNECTICUT FAIR HOUSING CENTER

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center. My name is Erin Kemple. I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center (hereinafter “the Center”). The Connecticut Fair Housing Center is a private non-profit dedicated to ensuring that all Connecticut residents have access to the housing of their choice. To accomplish this mission, the Center assists clients by addressing fair housing, fair lending, and homeowner rights through investigating claims of discrimination and the provision of legal representation, working with state and local governments to ensure that they fulfill their obligations under the fair housing laws, promoting integration, and stabilizing neighborhoods through foreclosure prevention.

I would like to begin by thanking the Governor for recommending that the State continue its support of the Center in the 2020 biennium budget. This Committee approved funding for the Center in the FY2019 budget and Governor Lamont’s 2020 biennium budget continues that funding. Thank you.

When introducing his 2020 biennium budget, Governor Lamont announced that his administration will make State government smarter, more responsive to residents, and more engaged with the private sector. By proposing to continue funding for the Connecticut Fair Housing Center, Governor Lamont is investing in an excellent example of a public-private partnership in action.
As a result of funding from the State of Connecticut, the Center was able to accomplish the following in 2018:

- Completed a study on mixed population housing that the Department of Housing was required to produce by the Legislature;
- Opened more than 1,000 new cases for the victims of housing discrimination and people in foreclosure which helped prevent homelessness as well as reliance on government agencies to investigate and resolve all fair housing and fair lending issues experienced by the Connecticut residents;
- Assisted people living in nursing homes move back into the community by addressing housing discrimination resulting in saving the State money in nursing home costs;
- Reviewed lending data to determine if banks were providing residential mortgages in neighborhoods of color to ensure that these areas had the capital they needed to thrive;
- Resolved more than 70 cases in our clients’ favor which ensured that they stayed housed or were able to move into appropriate housing;
- Worked with more than 250 tenants whose housing was condemned or shut down to ensure that they were able to access appropriate housing without becoming homeless;
- Assisted state and federal housing voucher holders use their vouchers to obtain housing and ensure that they are able to continue paying their rent;
- Worked with the Judicial Department to provide representation to people appearing pro se on foreclosure matters which makes the foreclosure courts run more smoothly and ensures that homeowners get the legal assistance they need;
- Helped homeowners to come current on their mortgages so they could resume paying municipal fees and taxes;
 Represented elderly homeowners in danger of losing their homes because of reverse mortgages;
 Taught more than 50 municipal employees how to identify and combat housing discrimination through our work with the Department of Housing and its Small Cities’ CDBG program;
 Reached more than 4,000 people through our education and outreach programs to prevent discrimination before it began;
 Produced materials in Spanish, Arabic, Vietnamese, Farsi, Kreyol, Polish, and Russian regarding the fair housing rights of people who are refugees or immigrants;

In the testimony and fact sheets included in your packets, our clients tell their stories much more eloquently than I can. We have submitted testimony from Sonya Malcom and Latisha Johnson, both of whom have family members who are disabled. Despite many requests to her landlord, Ms. Malcom could not get a parking place assigned to her mother’s home health aide which meant that her wheelchair bound mother was unable to get out to doctor’s appointments. Ms. Johnson’s son had multiple disabilities which were exacerbated by the mold and bad conditions in her apartment. With the Center’s assistance Ms. Johnson and her son are living in a healthy apartment and her son is doing much better. Ms. Carmen Arroyo’s testimony explains how the Center helped her son move from a nursing facility to her home leading to better care for her son who is a quadriplegic and saving the State money.

The Center has also been assisting people who are in foreclosure to keep their homes. Ms. Kelli Locke works as a school nurse and at a home healthcare agency. Despite this she got behind on her mortgage when she had a care accident, had to travel out of state or a funeral and had to pay to renew her nursing license. For ten months, Ms. Locke tried to negotiate with her
mortgage company who asked her to submit the same documents over and over again. Within weeks of hearing from the Center’s attorneys, Ms. Locke was offered a mortgage modification and is still living in her home with her six year old daughter.

These clients are just a few of the many people the organization helps each year with funding from the State. To ensure that the critical work of the Center continues in the future, we ask that this Committee approve funding of $670,000 in funding as recommended in the Governor’s 2020 biennium budget.

Thank you for your time and attention.