Governor’s Proposed Budget FY20-FY21
Appropriations Hearing
Department of Housing
Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for hearing my testimony today on the important investments to the Department of Housing’s budget that will support our statewide effort to end homelessness in Connecticut.

My name is Richard Cho and I am the Chief Executive Officer of the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. I speak before you today, representing more than 100 member agencies across our state who are working to end homelessness.

I am sympathetic of this committee’s unenviable position of having to balance many competing requests for resources. As you consider these requests, I would like to ask to consider the following questions: Of all of the policy issues and problems that come with resource requests before this committee, how many problems are brought to you where we know exactly what the solutions are, how many of these solutions are needed to solve the problem, what resource gaps exist, and how far each additional dollar invested will take us in solving the problem? I would venture to guess, “Not that many.” But that is precisely where we are on homelessness.

Over the past few years, homeless services and housing providers, working closely with CCEH, state agencies, and United Way of Connecticut’s 2-1-1 helpline, our state has transformed its response to homelessness from an uncoordinated set of programs and services towards a highly sophisticated statewide response, tackling homelessness like the public health crisis that it is:

- Whereas in the past, a person or family experiencing homelessness had to navigate a dizzying maze of programs and services to get help, we now have a centralized “front-door” to accessing shelter and a variety of housing and services interventions, matched to their needs.

- Previously, a person or family entering shelter was told that the only option to get help was to get on a long waiting list for housing, we now have a full range of tools to assist people in different ways ranging from flexible one-time financial assistance to short-term rental assistance and housing navigation to long-term rental subsidies to permanent supportive housing.

- Just a few years ago, we were only reviewing our data on an annual basis so could only provide a snapshot of what homelessness looked like and how many people were in need. Now, we have real-time data that enables us to say each month, how many
people are experiencing homelessness, how long they have been homeless, how many have been housed, and how many are newly entering homelessness. Because of this, we can now even project rates of homelessness into the future with some degree of accuracy.

These reforms, coupled with resources from the federal government and the state, we have made significant progress in reducing homelessness in Connecticut:

- Looking at the number of people who use homeless services on an annual basis, Connecticut has reduced homelessness overall by 34 percent since 2012.

- Connecticut is one of three states certified by the federal government (HUD, VA, USICH) as having achieved an effective end to homelessness among Veterans, meaning that the state has the resources and system in place to house any Veteran that falls into homelessness within 90 days.

- Connecticut has reduced the number of people with disabilities experiencing long-term homelessness (chronic homelessness) by 62 percent since 2014. The state is now working to prevent and end homelessness among all people with disabilities.

- The state is now working to end family and youth homelessness by 2020 and to end all homelessness in the next few years. Connecticut was one of the recipients of HUD’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP) grant, receiving $6.5 million over three years to create a full range of housing and services interventions for youth under 25 who are experiencing homelessness.

Providers working as part of Coordinated Access Networks across the state are working harder, in a more coordinated fashion, and helping more individuals, families, and youth experiencing homelessness than ever before. We are continually using performance metrics to drive greater housing placement rates, shorten lengths of stay in shelter and waits for assistance, minimizing returns to homelessness, and are even preventing people from falling into shelter.

But as any system that has achieved progress will find, achieving further gains and improvements gets harder and harder. As we are able to more quickly resolve homelessness among people who simply need less intensive forms of help, those who remain in the homeless services system are those with greater needs. Moreover, we continue to see a steady stream of families and individuals newly falling into housing crisis and homelessness. Our current data indicates that we are starting to see the reduction slowing as we are now assisting roughly about the same number of people as are newly falling into homelessness. Simple math tells us that if our outflow from homelessness is the same as new inflow, we will never see a reduction.

Statewide data for the month of February indicates that there are 1,994 individual and family households currently experiencing homelessness, and this episode of homelessness is on average 125 days. In that same month, 202 exited from homelessness, most into permanent
housing, and 293 were identified as newly homeless. So in February, we had a net increase of 91 households.

We can also project what rates of homelessness will be in the future, given the current trends. For instance, as shown in the below chart, our trendline on families shows that if current conditions remain constant, rates of family homelessness will remain steady. However, our estimates show that with the resources proposed by Governor Lamont in the FY20-21 Budget, we can bend the curve on homelessness. And if we are able to use existing federal resources differently and further improve our system performance, we can bend the curve even further.

![Family Homelessness (BNL) Projections - February 2019](image)

With all this in mind, I respectfully request that you support Governor Lamont’s proposed budget for critical housing and homelessness services, including:

- **The DOH Housing/Homeless Services line item provides 79.4 million in FY 20 and $84.8 million in FY 21.** This includes funding for the Rental Assistance Program (RAP) which is critical for supportive housing, as well as frontline homeless services, outreach, and emergency shelters, which are essential to aid those who have fallen into homelessness and move them quickly to housing.

- The funding allocations include new rental assistance to be paired with the implementation of a new Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit for High Cost High Need Individuals. Together, this Medicaid-financed supportive housing intervention will serve up to 850 highly vulnerable individuals who experience homelessness and is expected to result in a net savings to the state Medicaid costs as a result of reduced hospitalizations and other emergency health services.

- The Homeless Youth line item provides $2.3 million for youth outreach services, crisis housing for youth, and housing services and supports are essential services to transition youth from crisis to stability. This program is essential for addressing...
homelessness amongst unaccompanied young people. More than 5,000 youth were estimated to be experiencing homelessness or serious housing instability in the 2018 statewide youth count.

The Governor's proposed budget creates a new $2.48 million line item at the Department of Housing called 'Homeless Supports' which includes direct support for the Coordinated Access Network infrastructure including the 2-1-1 housing unit. The Coordinated Access Networks (CAN) system (including emergency shelters, rapid re-housing, the 2-1-1 Housing Unit, and community level coordination) have proven critical to our newly reformed response to homelessness and are what enables us to match people to the right level of assistance, facilitate faster housing placement and reduced waitlist times, and have real-time data tracking on homelessness.

This includes support to United Way of Connecticut 2-1-1 which serves as the front door of the CAN system. This past year, the 2-1-1 Housing Unit answered 78,768 calls seeking housing services. The Homeless Supports line item also includes support for coordination on the ground between homeless providers: in 2018 CANs conducted 13,613 intake appointments for shelter and housing services, and have housed more than 2,579 people since January 2015 experiencing chronic homelessness, bringing CT within reach of our goal of ending chronic homelessness.

While our 2-1-1 and CAN system isn’t perfect, it is a vast improvement from the days when a person experiencing homelessness had to call 20 or more organizations and apply to 20 different programs and be on 20 different waiting lists. We are continuing to work with the United Way of Connecticut and the CANs to make improvements and ensure access to assistance for all those that are in need. This past year, with the support of the Department of Housing, family providers worked to develop a process with 2-1-1 that will ensure that no family in Connecticut will experience unsheltered homelessness. The 2-1-1 Protocol for Homeless Families, helps 2-1-1 Housing Specialists to identify families who are experiencing literal homelessness and to provide them with a same day/next day appointment within their community. Families who are experiencing a housing crisis are provided with appointments with housing specialists within their community to assist them with their housing needs.

Investing in ending homelessness is a smart use of public resources that prevents needless human suffering and avoids wasteful public spending – it is an investment that pays dividends across our communities in a way few other investments can equal. We know what works to end homelessness and what further resources we need to get there. We are asking this committee to invest in our goal to make homelessness in Connecticut something that happens only exceedingly rarely, and whenever it is not prevented, remains a brief and one-time experience. Connecticut has the prospect of being the first state in the nation to achieve this goal and to show the nation that we do not and should not have to accept homelessness as a fixture in our national landscape.

Thank you for your time. Thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully,
Richard Cho
Chief Executive Officer
Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness