February 27, 2019

Good afternoon chairs and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Heather Mosher and I am a research scientist at the Institute for Community Research. The Institute for Community Research is a non-profit research institute that conducts collaborative research to transform lives, build alliances, and address root causes of health and educational disparities in the U.S. and globally. I submit this written testimony in support of preserving funding in the Department of Housing’s Homeless Youth line item in the Governor’s proposed budget.

Funding in this line item, which is administered as a successful joint collaboration between the Department of Housing and the Department of Children & Families, provides unaccompanied homeless young people, age 24 and under, throughout our state with critical services such as intensive case management services, outreach, emergency housing (shelter), and short-term rental assistance that allows youth to quickly exit homelessness and become self-sufficient.

In 2015, at the Institute for Community Research, I founded the Youth Action Hub, which is a center of youth-led research and advocacy at the Institute for Community Research in Hartford that is focused on tackling youth homelessness. What makes this research center unique is that the research staff are eight young people who have experienced homelessness, and who are trained and mentored by me using an evidence-based Youth Participatory Action Research training curriculum developed by the Institute for Community Research. Young people who have experienced homelessness have unique expertise to bring to the table about what is working and not working, and how to design a system that will prevent youth homelessness and help them regain stability if they fall into homelessness.

Over the past three years, we have conducted a statewide study to improve young people’s access to housing and other services as well as a longitudinal evaluation study on The Connection’s Start Program, which is funded through the Homeless Youth line item in the state budget. We are in the second year of this evaluation study and preliminary results demonstrate that this program helps young people regain their housing stability. Interviews with clients of the Start Program said this about the program:

Before getting into the Start Program, “I went from rooms to places and benches and it was bad ’cause it’s like you have to figure out where you’re gonna take a shower next. And then now it’s like, I come home and I’m like, oh, it’s awesome, something to call your own now. And it’s like, all right, The Connection doesn’t pay for [my rent] any more but I would never sit there and say I did this on my own ’cause I can’t. I can’t say that. I cannot. The Connection pushed me forward and got me my daughter back.”

“[The Start Program] affected me in the best of ways. Cause like I said, going from place to place and being in the program and then basically teaching me, how to budget, learn how to do this, learn how to do that, so in the long run, it helps you out ’cause when I got discharged from the program, I had $5000 in my savings account alone.”
"Without The Start Program, I'd still be in the shelter or without even being in a shelter, ...God knows where I'd be. It's hard to even get approved for an apartment. If I wasn't in The Connection, I never would've came this far. Like my dream in life was to always be a successful businesswoman. So being in college and being able to focus so much has meant so much. Before The Connection, I was not able to focus at all. I passed and I graduated with my certificate in accounting but I don't even know how because I couldn't concentrate in the classes. I couldn't focus, like I was getting bad grades on the tests and everything. I had no stability in my life. I was always stressing, crying. But when I had that stability and independence in my life, having my own home with my girls, look at me now. I have all A's in my classes. I've been doing amazing."

Please preserve funding in the Department of Housing's Homeless Youth line item in the Governor's proposed budget. These services and programs are critical for youth to quickly exit homelessness and become self-sufficient.

Thank you again for your time and for your continued support in ending youth homelessness in CT. Ameliorating youth homelessness in our state is one of the most sound decisions, both socially and financially, that we as a state can make.

Respectfully submitted by,

Heather Mosher, Ph.D.
Research Scientist
Institute for Community Research