Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and honorable members of the committee, my name is Kiley Gosselin and I am the Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). We are a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. PSC staffs and manages the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to end homelessness in Connecticut. We, and our many partners, know that homelessness is an unacceptable condition and an expensive public policy problem, and we know what it takes to end it. I respectfully request that the committee support the following proposals from the Governor’s budget for the Department of Housing (DOH).

Support funding for the DOH Housing and Homelessness Line Item at $79.4 million for FY 20 and $84.8 million for FY 21. This line item provides funding for a variety of critical housing and homelessness services and supports. As our data capabilities continue to progress, we are better able to not only track individuals and families as they enter and exit the homelessness system, but also determine when and how different housing and service resources are best used to assist people in exiting homelessness more quickly and ensuring that they remain stably housed permanently. Furthermore, we are better able to see and predict trends and determine, with increasing specificity, how the infusion of new resources will be best spent to get us to our goal of ending homelessness in Connecticut fastest.

The resources funded through this line item include the Rental Assistance Program (RAP), essential for supportive housing, as well as frontline homeless services, outreach and emergency shelters. These services aid those who have fallen into homelessness and help to move them quickly into housing. The funding allocation also includes the implementation of a new Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit for high-cost, high-need individuals, which has been estimated to serve up to 850 individuals experiencing homelessness and high cost burdens. We know that these individuals often utilize a large amount of Medicaid services with poor outcomes, resulting in over-utilization of emergency rooms, detox, inpatient hospitalizations and other high-cost services. This disproportionally contributes to rising public spending on health care. Supportive housing continues to be an effective housing model and is proven to cut public system costs by up to 70%.

We are also in support of the proposal to support the Homeless Youth Line Item at $2.3 million. This line item provides funding for youth outreach services, crisis housing options, and other supports and services that help to transition youth into more safe and stable outcomes. The needs and experiences of unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults differ drastically compared to other populations who find themselves experiencing homelessness or housing instability, so having a unique source of funding to help support them is equally as critical as money allocated for other processes and services in the homeless response system.
Although we are still learning about how to best reach and serve this population, we are setting goals and making strides. The statewide youth count indicated that more than 5,000 youth were experiencing housing instability or homelessness in 2018. The program's waitlist is currently a little over 300 young people. Efforts are under way to identify and mitigate some of the barriers they may face in getting connected to housing resources so that their experience of homelessness can be a rare, brief, one-time event, and funding for these efforts will be essential in connecting them to resources they need to thrive. Collaboration with educational institutions and partners at DCF and CSSD are also critical components of our work that will assist in ensuring that funding is spent in the most efficient manner possible.

We support adding funding for the Coordinated Access Network (CAN) Infrastructure to a new line item called 'Homeless Supports' for $2.48 million at the DOH. These funds are crucial to advancing our statewide efforts to end homelessness. We know what works to end homelessness – through coordinated efforts to secure the right housing and supports, we can resolve homelessness. For calendar year 2018, 2-1-1, the state's human service information and referral helpline, received 73,786 calls. Utilizing that single point of entry has allowed us to quickly screen and offer resources. When appropriate, connections are made to the other critical links in the infrastructure we have created, such as our eight Coordinated Access Networks (CANs) now serving all individuals and families experiencing literal homelessness across the state.

The CAN infrastructure allows us to greatly reduce duplication by assisting individuals in a coordinated and streamlined way that includes a single point of entry, a unified assessment tool, diversion, prioritization, and matching for appropriate housing resources. Once connected, the CANs across the state scheduled and met with 13,523 individuals seeking housing services and supports this past year.

CANs allow us to more effectively assign the right resources to each person to end their homelessness. We had never before been able to triage clients according to need. Resources were assigned often only on a "first come, first served" basis, and many of the highest need clients were not served appropriately, or at all. The system we have built through Coordinated Access allow our communities to respond better to client needs, and to assign services and housing more effectively and efficiently, including to those with the most severe and complex needs.

Creating a new line item to support the infrastructure CT has built for the CAN system is critical to maintaining progress on ending homelessness in the state. The new Homeless Supports line item with the inclusion of Rapid Rehousing will position Connecticut with a substantial component of the comprehensive strategy needed to reach the goal of ending family homelessness by the end of 2020. However, should funding for this infrastructure be removed, our system would become backlogged, risking the stability and security of CT residents most in need.

Lastly, we support the funds provided to reflect the 1% private provider COLA for both the Homeless Youth program, and the Housing/Homeless Services line items.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your support working towards ending homelessness for everyone in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Kiley Gosselin
Executive Director
Partnership for Strong Communities

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