Appropriations Hearing Department of Housing
Wednesday, February 27, 2019

Testimony of David Rich
Supportive Housing Works

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 through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in CT.

CT’s investment in ending homelessness is working. Our 2017 numbers of residents experiencing homelessness reflect the lowest annual total since 2012 — a 34% drop in five years. This progress is a direct result of the state’s dedication of resources to the creation of a highly effective, regionalized homelessness response system that includes service providers across multiple sectors and state agency partners who have (1) strategically aligned resources through Coordinated Access Networks (CANs), and (2) leveraged millions of private philanthropic dollars to serve more people more effectively.

Without your continued commitment of funding for this system, however, our hard-won gains will be lost. Our residents, our communities, and our state cannot afford to revert to paying for homelessness on the back end where it is significantly more expensive, through healthcare, incarceration, foster care, education and emergency services. We must continue to address and manage homelessness on the front end by supporting our homelessness response system.

To that end, the Governor’s proposed budget provides funding for critical components of CT’s homelessness response system including the following line items that I urge you to support:

- The DOH Housing/Homeless Services line item provides 79.4 million in FY 20 and $84.8 million in FY 21. This preserves the 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 also include the implementation of a new Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit for High Cost High Need Individuals.

- The Reallocation of CIA funds to the Department of Housing for Homeless Supports which provides $2.48 million for the Coordinated Access Network infrastructure including 2-1-1. The Coordinated Access Networks (CAN) system (including emergency shelters, rapid re-housing, the 2-1-1 housing unit, and community level coordination) are the linchpins of the homeless response system and critical to maintaining our progress ending homelessness.

- The Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit will serve up to 850 high need high cost individuals who experience homelessness. Supportive Housing continues to be the most effective housing model to assist people experiencing chronic and high need homelessness and is proven to cut public system costs by up to 70%.

- 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.

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It is important to consider that homelessness is inextricably linked with availability and access to affordable housing. In 2018, the National Low-Income Housing Coalition determined that CT would need to add 89,000+ units of affordable housing to meet the needs of its extremely low-income residents. Currently in our state, there exist only 36 units of affordable housing for every 100 extremely low-income households who need it. This affordable housing crisis is driving homelessness in CT.

To fully leverage the state’s investment in homeless services, the above budget line items must be accompanied by full support for innovative housing policies that address CT’s affordable housing crisis which were put forth by the Governor’s Housing Transition Committee.

- **Increase of Public Housing Authority capacity** to regionalize and share services, expand jurisdictions in coordination with surrounding communities, and integrate with CANs to expand voucher use into high opportunity areas. *PHA’S BRING CRITICAL FEDERAL $$ INTO THE SYSTEM. COMMUNITIES AND RESIDENTS CAN’T AFFORD DISFUNCTIONAL, INEFFICIENT PHA’S.*
- **Create a statewide, housing data system** to inform strategic investment in housing and housing programs. *RESOURCES MUST BE STRATEGICALLY DEPLOYED BASED ON DATA ASSESSING NEEDS AND HOUSING INVENTORY.*
- **Support cities and towns to leverage private markets** in order to meet the state’s affordable housing needs. *PRIVATE DEVELOPERS MUST BE PART OF THE SOLUTION TO MEET THE SCALE OF HOUSING NEEDS.*
- **Ensure a continuous pipeline of bonding dollars** as a critical means of supporting affordable housing development at an impactful volume. *PRIVATE DOLLARS MUST BE LEVERAGED TO SUPPORT A ROBUST PIPELINE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING PRODUCTION AND PRESERVATION.*

I urge you to support the Governor’s proposed investments in CT’s homelessness response system that save public resources and help families and individuals transition to housing, stability, and hope.

Additionally, I want to impress upon you the importance of understanding homelessness in the greater context of CT’s affordable housing landscape, and in supporting and prioritizing a full spectrum of housing solutions.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and left unresolved, a crippling expensive public policy problem that our state cannot afford. Targeted services and access to affordable housing are the only way forward.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and for your support of housing and the homelessness response system in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

David Rich  
Executive Director  
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