Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the important investments the state is making through the Department of Housing to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. My name is Richard Porth and I serve as the CEO of United Way of Connecticut.

Governor Lamont’s proposed budget provides funding for critical housing and homelessness services and supports. Thanks to the leadership from the Governor and the Department of Housing and the ongoing support of the legislature, Connecticut continues to lead the nation in efforts to end homelessness – saving lives and saving public dollars. Preserving state investments in frontline homelessness prevention services, permanent supportive housing, and support services such as the State’s Coordinated Access Network, saves public resources and helps families and individuals transition to housing, establish stability, and ultimately achieve their full potential.

Connecticut’s continued success in fighting homelessness is due to the state’s investment in efforts to end homelessness and to create more affordable housing. Connecticut’s success is also the direct result of a system built upon the collective effort of government agencies, numerous nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, housing advocates and housing providers. Through this public-private collaboration, we have demonstrated that government can tackle big problems like homelessness and achieve unprecedented success.

Connecticut United Ways and Connecticut 2-1-1 share the belief that everyone deserves a place to call home. In 2014, 2-1-1 Connecticut became the central intake point for Connecticut’s Coordinated Access Network (CAN). Coordinated Access helps people who are homeless or imminently homeless access community resources within seven regions, aimed at fulfilling the federal HEARTH Act’s goals of: 1.) avoiding homelessness whenever possible; 2.) minimizing the length of stay in shelter; and 3.) preventing the need to re-enter shelter after leaving. This is accomplished through collaboration among many community and state and local government partners under state leadership.

The state’s innovative leadership and its investment in ending homelessness through the Coordinated Access Network System has made Connecticut a national leader:

- Connecticut was recognized in 2016 by the federal government as one of the first two states in the nation to end chronic homelessness among Veterans.
• From January 2015 to December 2018, Connecticut providers housed 2,579 people experiencing chronic homelessness, bringing Connecticut within reach of our goal of ending chronic homelessness.
• Since 2014, a 69 percent decrease in individuals experiencing chronic homelessness has been achieved based on a systemic strategy (Coordinated Access) matching chronically homeless people to a housing resource.
• The 2018 Point in Time “PIT” Count reflected the lowest total ever in a statewide PIT Count for overall total population, families, and chronically homeless since the first statewide count in 2007.
• In 2018, 2-1-1 answered 94,773 calls from people in need of housing services, many of whom were facing imminent risk of homelessness. 2-1-1 Contact Specialists provided assistance to help many of these callers with immediate housing needs by linking them to utility assistance, basic needs assistance, financial assistance and other supports.
• Since January 2018, the seven regional Coordinated Access Networks have conducted 26,875 intake appointments, assessing degree of need and which services will lead to the best outcome.

All of you who have had a hand in these achievements deserve much credit. Now, the challenge is to sustain this great achievement. We have learned that we can do this AND at the same time save tax payer dollars.

2-1-1 is proud to be partners with the state, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, dozens of shelter providers and public and nonprofit agencies, and the Partnership for Strong Communities in this crucial work to end homelessness. The Governor’s proposed budget creates a new line item at the Department of Housing called Homeless Supports which provides $2.48 million 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) are the linchpins of the homeless response system and critical to maintaining our progress in ending homelessness. We respectfully request that the state continue its investment in Connecticut’s Coordinated Access system which has helped many Connecticut residents avoid homelessness, avoided the need for much costlier interventions, and made Connecticut a national leader in fighting homelessness.

Thank you for your continued commitment to addressing homelessness in Connecticut. It is the right thing to do, good for our people, good for our communities and good for Connecticut.