Testimony in support of Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
Governor’s Proposed Budget FY2020-FY2021 Appropriations Hearing
Friday, March 1, 2019

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Chelsea Ross and I am the New England Associate Director for the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH). Thank you for considering my testimony today in support of the imperative investments made through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to ensure that those with the greatest needs within our state have a place in the community and the support they need to thrive.

CSH is a nationally recognized expert on supportive housing, an evidence-based, research-backed approach to serving those in the greatest need with a combination of affordable housing and community-based services. As an expert intermediary, CSH brokers strong collaborations and guides agencies, partners, and other stakeholders through training and education, lending, consulting and assistance, and policy reform. Our goal is to ensure that more communities are able to create and operate high-quality supportive housing and to make supportive housing work better for more people—especially the highest-cost, highest-need individuals. We are also key partners in the statewide Reaching Home and Home CT campaigns to create affordable housing and prevent and end homelessness in the state.

Connecticut has been a national leader in identifying, housing, and providing support services to its high-need, high-cost citizens, including those experiencing homelessness. The Governor’s proposed budget provides critical funding via the DMHAS Housing Supports line item for the housing and homelessness services and supports needed to allow individuals and families which face the most complex challenges to live with stability, autonomy, and dignity. These funds provide non time-limited services and supports that assist individuals and families to live independently in the community and meet their obligations of tenancy. Support services are individualized, flexible, and focus on improving housing stability, increasing income and employment, addressing health and wellness issues, and enhancing connections to community resources. Without the availability of these services and supports, households experience costly returns to crisis systems including hospitals, shelters, and justice settings.

Historically, Connecticut has achieved great strides in addressing the housing and service needs of our vulnerable citizens by pairing rental subsidies with the wraparound supports and services via DMHAS. Nationally, other states struggle to adequately support high need individuals in housing as a result of various uncoordinated, underfunded, and poorly targeted service funding streams. Stable and coordinated service funding allows DMHAS to improve service delivery, reduce disjointed or overlapping housing and service provision, and ensure high quality supportive housing. Over the past 10+ years, CSH has worked with other states to replicate Connecticut’s service funding and delivery structure. However, as these states work to make considerable investments in service funding parallel to their investments in maximizing their affordable housing stock, the erosion of the DMHAS Housing Supports funding over the past few years has stunted our progress and hurt those in need. Past
budget rescissions have led to a gap in housing stabilization support and wraparound services that keep highly vulnerable people stable in their housing, and improve their social determinants of health.

CSH works alongside DMHAS to help ensure better outcomes for supportive housing tenants. Through this partnership we have had the opportunity to evaluate supportive housing outcomes and spend time talking with agencies’ leadership, front-line staff, and supportive housing tenants. We are able to see and hear first-hand the stories of individuals whose lives have been changed by the recovery and wellness-based services provided across our state. We are also currently working with DMHAS and the UConn School of Social Work/DMHAS Research Division to evaluate outcomes for supportive housing tenants. Preliminary data from this evaluation, scheduled to be completed mid-year 2019, shows increases in tenants’ housing stability, connections to income and benefits, health outcomes, connections to community resources, and family stability at 6 months, 12 months, 18 months, and 24 months post housing.

Data from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) for calendar year 2018 indicates that 48.8% of households in supportive housing increased their income from entry to exit, higher than any other housing intervention. The same data shows us that only 4% of households that exited supportive housing to a permanent housing destination in 2018 returned to homelessness, which is the lowest rate of return to homelessness of any housing intervention.

As we continue to overcome barriers to increase the stock of supportive housing to meet the need in the state, this work is moot without these services to support households’ tenancy. This is mitigated by preserving the crucial funding for DMHAS, and augmenting this funding with the Medicaid state plan option for supportive housing services as proposed by the Governor in both the Department of Social Services and Department of Housing budgets.

Any action other than preserving Housing Supports would risk reversing the substantial progress we have made as a state, and will result in increases in high-need, vulnerable, disabled individuals and families experiencing homelessness— taking us the wrong direction and imposing even greater costs on our system. Without this funding we will continue to allow disabled and high need members of our community to languish in homelessness and other costly crisis systems instead of investing in them and their right to safely live and thrive as we do. Thank you for considering my testimony and thank you for your commitment to the thousands of individuals and families DMHAS works to serve.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Ross

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CSH

https://ctcandata.org/dashboards/supportive-housing/