Good evening, Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Alicia Woodsby, and I’m the Senior Policy Advisor at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). PSC is a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. We staff and manage the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Thank you for hearing my testimony today on the important investments through the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to support efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

We know what works to end chronic homelessness (long term homeless and disabling condition): permanent supportive housing, which combines safe, secure rental housing that is affordable, independent, and permanent with voluntary support services provided by staff trained in working with people experiencing homelessness and with disabilities. Supportive housing is a solution for those with high needs experiencing homelessness because it addresses its root causes. It is an alternative to more expensive and less effective institutional settings and is proven to save communities up to 70% of the costs they will otherwise incur when chronic homelessness persists.

Supportive services for those who enter permanent supportive housing are provided under the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services’ Housing Supports and Services line item, which is maintained at $23 million for each year of the biennium in the Governor’s proposed budget. We ask that you support the Governor’s proposal to maintain these critical support services for permanent supportive housing that are essential for keeping these high-need individuals housed and stable.

From January 2014 to December 2018, Connecticut housed 2,579 individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, resulting in a 62% decrease in the number of people experiencing chronic homelessness. In January 2019, there were 197 adults experiencing chronic homelessness in Connecticut.

Any cuts to supportive housing services would risk reversing the substantial progress we have made to end chronic homelessness, and could mean increases in unsheltered, high-need homelessness — taking us in the wrong direction and imposing new costs on our communities.
The state is in particular need of these services that keep highly vulnerable people stable in their housing, as recent budget rescissions have led to a gap in the service system that is being felt across the state. We must hold the line on existing supportive housing resources and be even more efficient and resourceful with securing new units if we are going to bend the curve.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. For people with serious disabilities, it costs substantially more for them to be in homelessness, than to have access to a rental subsidy and service supports. Through unprecedented collaboration, and strategic state and federal investments, we’ve figured out how to dramatically reduce this problem. We can finish the job.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I’m happy to answer any questions.

Alicia Woodsby, MSW
Senior Policy Advisor
Partnership for Strong Communities