Governor’s Proposed Budget FY2020-FY2021
Appropriations Hearing
Department of Social Services
Tuesday, March 5th, 2019

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today in support of the Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit through the Department of Social Services to assist high need high cost Medicaid beneficiaries who are experiencing homelessness in accessing and retaining stable housing and meaningfully engaging with their health goals.

As the Executive Director of Hands On Hartford and having lived and worked in Hartford non profits for nearly all of the past 35 years, I celebrate that Connecticut continues to lead the nation in efforts to address the important and expensive problem of homelessness. These investments in proven solutions to homelessness are necessary to continue our progress and ensure that every youth, family, and individual has a place to call home.

In 2016, Connecticut was one of eight states selected through a competitive process to participate in the Medicaid-Housing Partnership Innovation Accelerator Program. Through this initiative technical assistance was provided to help Connecticut design ways to support individuals served by Medicaid in accessing and retaining stable housing and engaging with their health goals. Under this proposal, a 1915(i) state plan home and community-based services benefit will be developed to provide supportive housing to up to 850 individuals who experience homelessness and whose average Medicaid costs exceed $40,000 per year.

As you may know, transition and tenancy-sustaining supports have been found to be effective at achieving housing stability as well as improved health, community integration and life satisfaction. This proven, cost-effective strategy has been shown to lower public costs associated with the use of crisis services such as shelters, hospitals, jails, and prisons.

It’s important to note that after factoring in the federal share, this proposal is expected to reduce total Medicaid expenditures by $2.7 million in FY 2020 and $13.9 million in FY 2021.

Homelessness is a costly problem, in the toll it takes on human lives, and the toll it takes on public resources. We know what works to end homelessness – through coordinated efforts to secure the right housing and supports, we can resolve homelessness – one person, one family at
a time. The net gain to those we serve, to our communities, and to our state is clear: it costs more to allow homelessness to persist than it does to resolve it.

In our work at Hands On Hartford over 30 years providing supportive housing and healthcare services to people living with complicated medical issues, including HIV, and the last six (6) years as part of the Social Innovation Fund/CT Integrated Health and Housing Neighborhood project (SIF/CIHNN) serving homeless individuals with a variety of complex health issues and high Medicaid costs, we’ve seen this effective pairing of supports play out in the lives of homeless folks with the extensive physical and behavioral health conditions. Although there have been many hundreds of people and families who have benefited over the years, one person, who I’ll call Jose, typifies the ability for these resources to reduce costs, improve health and a lead to a meaningful quality of life.

Jose has spent most of his adult life in and out of institutional care and homelessness. Now in his 40s, he came to our SIF/CIHNN services having spent years in and out of prison, emergency psychiatric care, and was also a frequent user of the local emergency departments due to his untreated psychiatric and chronic medical conditions including liver disease and HIV, and his trauma history which made him reluctant to engage. Our team worked to build trust with him, housed him in stable, affordable housing, and provided intensive supports to help him engage in and stay in health care. Not only has he had an emergency department visit in years, he’s stayed out of jail and prison as well. Jose, now having a stable place to call home and feeling well physically and mentally, is able to turn his attention to what’s next in terms of education and a job.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. We urge you to support the Medicaid Supportive Housing Benefit through the Department of Social Services to assist individuals like Jose who are served by Medicaid in accessing the supportive housing needed to maintain stable housing, reduce use of expensive institutional and emergency care, and improve their overall health outcomes and well-being.

Thank you for hearing my testimony and thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Barbara A.

Shaw, LCSW

Executive Director

Hands On Hartford