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.

Connecticut continues to lead the nation in efforts to address the important and expensive problem of homelessness, and investments in supportive housing over the past few years have allowed Connecticut to become a national leader. The upcoming possibility to leverage Medicaid to provide housing to our most vulnerable neighbors is an innovative opportunity that can help Connecticut remain a leader, but more importantly, can help ensure that as a state we are providing an essential safety net to individuals and families with significant disabilities who have fallen through every crack in our state’s social safety net.

- Investment 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.

- 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. While this program has not yet been operating in Connecticut, over the past few years in my work with Journey Home I have seen supportive housing end the homelessness of individuals who had spent years on the street, utilizing the Emergency Rooms of St. Francis and Hartford Hospital for medical care as well as shelters. Connection to supportive housing, which this resource could help us create, is an option that results in lower utilization of emergency rooms, and healthier Connecticut residents.
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.

Last year, after a couple of months of connection to an Outreach worker from my office, we succeeded in connecting a very vulnerable individual who had been homeless for many years with a supportive housing program. This particular individual had been homeless for years, and had traveled throughout Connecticut utilizing emergency rooms and hospital stays for a few days at a time. He lived like this for months, surviving on the fringes, because a past traumatic experience made him unwilling to utilize traditional shelters. In the six months before he was housed he visited emergency rooms more than 50 times. After he was housed with supportive housing, over his first six months, there were still a handful of visits to the hospital, but only a handful. This individual was able to focus on recovery, and even started working part time. He is now connected to a primary care physician, and is no longer homeless. He has been living safely in an apartment since last February, and his health is in a much more stable condition. He is one person whose life has been dramatically improved by supportive housing, but his story is not unique. There are hundreds of people across the state whose housing crisis could be ended, and whose health could be improved, by supportive housing.

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 served by Medicaid in accessing the supportive housing needed to maintain stable housing and improve their overall health outcomes and well-being.

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

Sincerely,

Mollie Greenwood

Coordinated Access Network Manager

Journey Home, Inc.