



**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE  
Governor's FY21 Midterm Budget Adjustments  
Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services  
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 21<sup>ST</sup>, 2020**

**KILEY GOSSELIN  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR  
PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES**

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle, and honorable members of the committee, my name is Kiley Gosselin and I am the Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). We are a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing, and building strong communities in Connecticut. PSC staffs and manages the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to end homelessness in Connecticut. We, and our many partners, know that homelessness is an unacceptable condition and an expensive public policy problem, and we know what works to end it. I respectfully request that the Committee support the following proposals from the Governor's budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS).

**We are supportive of the enacted budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services' Housing Supports and Services line at \$23 million.**

Since 2016, Connecticut has seen a 66% reduction in chronic homelessness. Just this month, there were approximately 178 adults experiencing chronic homelessness in the state. While we've seen dramatic reductions in the number of people who are chronically homeless, we know that any cuts to supportive housing services would risk reversing this substantial progress, and could result in increases in unsheltered, high-need homelessness – taking us in the wrong direction and imposing new costs on our communities.

The state is still in strong need of 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 be able to get to zero on chronic homelessness. While a relatively small population of people with serious disabilities in long term homelessness remains, they account for a disproportionately high level of resources and cost. 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 if we can permanently house those remaining in chronic homelessness and provide safe, affordable housing with supports for people with serious disabilities before they ever have to enter chronic homelessness.

**To that end, we strongly support the expansion of \$3 million the Governor has included in the DMHAS' Discharge and Diversion Services line for community placements for individuals at Connecticut Valley Hospital to support those who are ready for discharge back into their communities. It is critical that state**



**systems have the resources to discharge people to safe, stable housing options, in order to avoid people languishing in institutions, in an endless cycle of recidivism, or exiting into homelessness.**

In addition, **a new targeted investment of \$1 million at the DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line** would allow support services to be paired with rental assistance or other affordable units to serve additional highly vulnerable people in need of supportive housing and improve their housing stability, income and employment, health and wellness, and enhance connections to community resources.

The housing first model Connecticut operates by is reflective of the theory that if you have a stable place to live, other decisions and actions are easier to take to resolve a crisis situation. With this additional investment, those experiencing crisis would benefit from the peace of mind that comes with knowing they can afford to stay in their current living arrangement while they work within their community on stabilizing other areas they may be seeking support in.

Lastly, **we request \$375,000 in new funding at the DMHAS' Housing Supports and Services line** for enhanced homeless outreach that would enable us to better identify individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This capacity is extremely limited at present, leaving people outside and vulnerable to severe and unsafe conditions.

We cannot make homelessness rare and brief if people are experiencing unsheltered homelessness, and we cannot identify and engage people who are unsheltered without outreach capacity. By increasing capacity for outreach workers, we increase their ability to form meaningful relationships with high need, vulnerable individuals, youth or families that may be hesitant to engage with the homeless response system, or who may simply be unaware of the services that are out there to support them in achieving stability. Forming a relationship with an outreach worker who can help to make those connections for them is crucial in moving through and beyond their crisis situation.

Again, I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your support working towards ending homelessness for everyone in Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Kiley Gosselin  
Executive Director  
Partnership for Strong Communities

