

## **2023 Advocacy Plan**

Connecticut maintains one of the strongest homeless response systems in the nation and has achieved success in eradicating homelessness in our veteran community, one of the first states to do so. The strength of this system also allowed us to safely and successfully decompress our shelters and house people in need during the pandemic. We are confident that homelessness in its entirety can be ended and prevented in our state with the right plan, in cooperation with our partners, and with the appropriate level of funding.

Critical to our success is our ability to secure legislative victories that:

- Recognize housing as a human right
- Address the root causes of homelessness
- Provide the funding necessary to adequately support Connecticut’s statewide homeless response system

Towards that end, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) developed an advocacy plan which reflects the input received during the 2022 Listening Sessions. Our goal is to propel ending homelessness in Connecticut to the top of the list of priorities with legislators, the Governor’s Office, and with our Congressional Delegation in Washington, DC.

### **The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness**

The Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) is a membership organization of community-based homeless service providers across the state whose collective mission is to prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut. CCEH is the leading voice for the homeless and the providers who work tirelessly in communities across the state to find housing for those in need. We have longstanding, productive, and collaborative relationships with elected officials at all levels of government, and these officials have come to rely on CCEH as the primary source for reliable, expedient, and data-driven information and our invaluable statewide perspective on the state of homelessness in Connecticut.

### **Fully Embracing Our New Role and Responsibility**

CCEH recently assumed sole leadership statewide for preventing and ending homelessness in Connecticut. An internal assessment of our advocacy needs was validated through a series of listening sessions held with our provider partners and key stakeholders; we identified the following needs to support our legislative activities:

- An advocacy plan that delineates roles and responsibilities up and down the organization and fully engages and leverages the expertise and knowledge of our CCEH leadership, our provider partners, and frontline staff.
- A clearly articulated and prioritized multi-year legislative agenda.

- A lobbyist, to assist us in building upon and improving the relationships we've built with legislators, amplify our voice in Hartford and Washington, D.C. and deliver on-the-ground updates, information, and insights to advance our efforts.
- CCEH is dedicated to operating under a collective impact model and considering Collective Impact 3.0.

### **Setting Legislative Priorities**

We have established a cohesive and inclusive process for identifying our legislative priorities:

1. In October, we will be asking each CAN to present their top 5 legislative priorities. These legislative priorities will be shared with the Advocacy Committee to help to inform the development of the 2023 Legislative Agenda.
2. An Advocacy Committee will be established to review input from the listening sessions and vet all legislation that has been proposed over the past several years against the sector's priorities and objectives. The Advocacy Committee will also be tasked with finalizing the 2023 Legislative Agenda and supporting the organization's advocacy plan.
3. Membership of the committee will include 2 people nominated and elected by each CAN who have the expertise and interest in advocacy.

### **Retaining a Lobbyist**

CCEH has secured the services of Sullivan and LeShane, Inc. to serve as a year-round lobbyist focused solely on the homeless response sector. CCEH worked closely with a small team of homeless service providers from across Connecticut to interview firms, and together we determined that Sullivan and LeShane is best equipped to help us secure the investments and policy change needed to prevent and end homelessness.

### **Bolstering Our In-House Capabilities**

CCEH Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Evonne Klein will work closely with Chief Operating Officer (COO) Sarah Fox to develop, launch, and sustain our statewide advocacy work. In addition, CCEH intends to hire a Policy Analyst, who will support the CEO and COO in policy analysis, agenda development, and execution of advocacy efforts. CCEH has retained one UCONN School of Social Work intern (unpaid) who will assist with community organizing and policy work for the duration of the 2022-2023 school year.

### **Mobilizing the Effort**

We know achieving our mission requires a legion of advocates working across Connecticut. The Advocacy Committee will lead in advocacy efforts with legislators. We know that lawmakers listen first and foremost to their local constituents, and as such, our community partners represent a tremendous source of support for our organization's legislative priorities. We have a currently underleveraged asset in our community partners. Our advocacy plan includes a mechanism to mobilize our in-district homeless advocates to educate, inform and advocate on behalf of our sector and its legislative priorities. In August, guidance was sent to providers outlining the steps to take this fall to begin this process, starting with educating candidates on homelessness and the role their

organization plays in combatting it, beginning the build for the 2023 session. This year, legislative leads from each of our provider-members will be identified and trained to represent our sector locally. Their role will be to build relationships with their legislators as well as local elected officials, community members and opinion leaders. We seek to recruit legislative leads within our provider communities from all over Connecticut and prioritize people who are historically left out of policy and legislative conversations in Connecticut, including front-line staff, people of color (particularly Black and Indigenous POC, people with disabilities, LGBTQIA individuals, and people with direct experience of homelessness).

### **Commitment to Justice Informed Advocacy Work**

Our foremost goal at CCEH is to prevent and end homelessness for all individuals, and this includes people involved with the criminal justice system. Housing justice and equity is central to this work. Our goal is to ensure adequate public investment in many forms of housing assistance to help people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness to connect to stable housing. We are seeking policy and systems reform which prevent individuals from being criminalized for homelessness in every community across our state, and for those who are incarcerated we are seeking policy advancements that will help ensure that when they return to their communities, they have access to safe, stable, affordable housing and the supports needed to live in dignity. In addition, we will advance policy so that criminal records do not lead people to remain homeless through denials by landlords and housing providers.

### **2023 Advocacy Plan Outline**

The following is an outline of CCEH's Advocacy Plan for 2023 and items for consideration as we continue to build out our work for the upcoming legislative session.

**CCEH Mission:** Prevent and end homelessness in Connecticut

#### **Advocacy Goals:**

1. Long-term goal to achieve success with the passing of legislation that funds the frontline, commits to housing as a human right and provides the resources necessary to combat the root causes of homelessness; grow base of active support among provider staff at all levels;
2. Secure passage of the sector's 2023 Legislative Agenda (once set after legislative listening sessions, hiring of lobbyist, and forming of Advocacy Committee); and
3. Long-term goal to fully fund the homeless response system to achieve our collective mission.

**Objectives:** To be formed once the 2023 Legislative Agenda is finalized

#### **Infrastructure:**

1. Advocacy Committee – to be formed
2. Legislative Leads – to be identified
3. Lobbyist secured
4. Communication Tools – CCEH will create support information for advocates and providers; constant contact; one-click politics; meetings; rallies; days of action; media

5. Assets/Resources:

- Funding to support advocacy and policy – CCEH budget, membership fees, grants, including funding for lobbyist
- Create information for advocates – CCEH
- People – CCEH staff, Executive Directors, CAN leadership, COC representation, staff at all provider organizations, state agencies (sometimes), board members, and people with lived experience of homelessness
- Tools – Constant Contact, One-Click Politics, meetings, rallies, days of action, lobbyist, media
- Challenges – Funding, education, and participation

**Allies:**

1. Various legislators including State Senator Saud Anwar, State Senator Richard Lopes, State Representative Matthew Ritter, State Representative Cristin McCarthy-Vahey, State Representative Jason Rojas, State Representative Quentin Williams, State Representative Jeff Currey
2. Various Commissioners – DOH, DMHAS, DSS, DOC, OEC, DOE, DCF, DSS
3. All staff of providers
4. Various organizations/partners – included but not limited to the Partnership for Strong Communities, Melville Charitable Trust, CSH, CCADV, CT Legal Aid, Housing Authorities, municipal leaders, community foundations, United Way of Connecticut, and local United Ways, CT Nonprofit Alliance.
5. Opponents – various legislators, competing budget needs

**Targets:**

1. The Appropriations Committee, The Housing Committee, legislative housing champions, supporters of homeless/housing, Governor, Commissioners are who can make this happen.
2. Legislative Leaders
3. Black and Puerto Rican Caucus

**Tactics:**

Early	Mid-term	On-going
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish relationships with in-district sitting legislators, by setting meetings/tours for early fall</li> <li>• Create legislative agenda by December 15<sup>th</sup></li> <li>• Create and distribute legislative calendar/timeline</li> <li>• Conduct a pre-session policy convening with legislative champions</li> <li>• Schedule meeting with governor with key leaders</li> <li>• Schedule a primer on homelessness for legislators and staff</li> <li>• Provide board members, CCEH members, funders, chief elected officials and human services municipal staff and contributors info for an email or call of support for legislative agenda in a timely manner.</li> <li>• Encourage all CANs to host legislative breakfasts/gatherings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testify and mobilize advocates to testify in person and/or submit written testimony on key legislation</li> <li>• Post testimony from organizations on social media, CCEH website, share op-eds</li> <li>• Encourage Executive Directors to share their/staff testimony with board members</li> <li>• Schedule a day (s) at the capitol mid-session</li> <li>• Maintain presence/activities at the LOB and with legislators throughout the entirety of the legislative session</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with lobbyist on all efforts</li> <li>• Continuous engagement with legislative leads/ Advocacy Committee</li> <li>• Schedule press releases, op-eds, and social media on various pieces of legislative agenda</li> <li>• Selectively send any materials press releases to legislators</li> <li>• Seek opportunities for other events that are housing focused</li> <li>• Invite legislators to local and statewide events. Encourage homeless service providers and CANs to do the same</li> </ul>

**Action Items and Immediate Next Steps:**

1. Schedule interviews with potential lobbyist and select – Completed
2. Secure funding for above
3. Develop process to establish legislative agenda – in process of scheduling meetings with CANs
4. Develop all info materials and enlist help from other leaders in sector or DOH staff – once 2023 Legislative Agenda is set
5. Resume Advocacy Meetings – once committee is formed
6. Advocacy Committee will oversee efforts in their CANs
7. Establish a statewide effort to prevent and end homelessness, to replace the retired Reaching Home Campaign. It will be a different organizational structure. – End of September

**Miscellaneous Actions Post Session:**

1. Debrief with CCEH members, housing crisis providers, frontline staff, the Advocacy Committee, and legislative leads regarding the outcome of the legislative session to begin planning for 2024 and the short session
2. Continued engagement with legislators