



## Testimony of Supportive Housing Providers Association of Illinois

May 21, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to address the FY 2021 budget for Illinois supportive housing services.

The Supportive Housing Providers Association of Illinois is a statewide association of supportive housing agencies providing critical services to adults and youth who are formerly homeless and/or at risk of homelessness, individuals with an intellectual or physical disability, children and adults with mental illness, and veterans with PTSD and fighting substance abuse.

Supportive housing pairs affordable housing with wrap-around, person-centered supportive services to improve quality of life while reducing demands on local first responders and saving state and local taxpayer dollars. We offer case management, advocacy, alcohol and substance abuse counseling, mental health programs, and other critical services. Across the state, we serve an estimated 17,869 people.

This spring, with Illinois fighting to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, supportive housing providers have been on the front line of that effort. We have been faced with major challenges that include:

***A Reboot of Our Service Delivery Model:*** Providers must now meet clients almost exclusively in their homes. They provide transportation services and deliver food and medicine. Telehealth meetings are not possible for many households in supportive housing as they do not have the technical skills to utilize the software or the access to proper equipment to take advantage of these resources.

***Increased Costs:*** The change in service delivery has created higher costs in wages and travel expenses. Providers also must now utilize PPE and more frequently sanitize offices and vehicles to help prevent the spread of COVID-19.

***Reduced Cash Flow:*** Supportive housing providers are nonprofit entities relying on diverse funding streams to operate. Major fundraisers, which produce critical agency revenue, have been cancelled. Also, many of their financial donors cannot now provide donations because of their own COVID-19-related challenges. Providers do not charge clients for services and cannot recoup the increased cost of services.

We recognize that the state's revenue condition is precarious and that Illinois lawmakers today are faced with extraordinarily difficult choices. But we also know that supportive housing, especially in this pandemic, is essential to protecting the health and safety of vulnerable men, women and children in our state. The supportive housing population includes multiple categories of individuals who are at higher risk of complications or death from COVID-19, including:

- 71% of the supportive housing population identifies as black/African American;
- 43% of adults report a mental health condition;

- 27% of residents are over the age of 50;
- 21% of adults report a chronic health condition;
- 20% of adults report a substance use condition; and
- 17% of adults report a physical health condition.

If these individuals lose supportive housing services, they could be homeless and at much higher risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19. We are working now, together with the state, to help contain the spread of that virus.

We also are rebuilding the capacity we lost during the state's budget impasse, when funding for supportive housing services was dramatically reduced. Since the end of the impasse, our member providers have worked to expand our reach to end homelessness for more men, women and children in Illinois. In FY 2020, an estimated 12,397 Illinoisans will receive homeless services – an increase, from three years ago, of more than 4,000 individuals served.

In FY 2021, we are prepared to provide the services to support individuals residing in an additional 600 units of supportive housing. To implement this expansion of services, while maintaining existing operations without interruption, supportive housing providers would require increased funding, relative to the FY 2020 appropriation, of \$3 million. That is \$1.6 million to sustain current services while addressing cost increases associated with the pandemic, and \$1.4 million to provide services for individuals residing in the 600 new units. Today, we respectfully make a request for a total of \$44.2 million from the state budget in FY 2021.

Our members operate at or near capacity. Unmet need for supportive housing is substantial and ongoing. Expanded state funding for supportive housing will serve more people at risk of homelessness and/or with a physical or intellectual disability, bolster the state's effort to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, and protect additional lives.

Again, we recognize the challenging budget circumstance. But please know that any decrease in state funding for supportive housing services could exacerbate homelessness in Illinois and all of the concerns that would entail. Men, women and children currently housed in a stable and supportive environment could return to the streets, tax the resources of first responders, stress the capacities of emergency rooms, and create other costs for the state and local governments. Simply put, any loss of supportive housing services during this pandemic would undermine the state's effort to protect the lives of vulnerable Illinoisans.

We appreciate your time and consideration of supportive housing services. We look forward to continuing this dialogue throughout the next fiscal year and beyond. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions you may have.

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