PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES

*Partnership for Strong Communities promotes equitable change in Connecticut housing policy by coordinating advocacy, advancing research, and uniting diverse partners.*

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSING COMMITTEE**
**CHELSEA ROSS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**
**PARTNERSHIP FOR STRONG COMMUNITIES**
**FEBRUARY 18, 2025**

## H.B. 6938 – AN ACT INCREASING THE NUMBER OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CERTIFICATES

Representative Felipe, Senator Marx, Representative Scott, Senator Sampson and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **in support of H.B. 6938 – AN ACT INCREASING THE NUMBER OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM CERTIFICATES**. I am Chelsea Ross, Executive Director at the Partnership for Strong Communities. We are a statewide nonprofit research, policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring everyone in Connecticut has a safe, stable home that is affordable to them in an equitable community of their choice.

We support the expansion of the state Rental Assistance Program (RAP). We urge the legislature to increase funding for RAP by **$20M in each year of the budget**, including:

- $11.5M each year to keep pace with rising rents and prevent a 15% reduction in the number of families served. avoid program serving 15% less families.
- $8.5M each year to expand the program to **serve an additional 650 low-income families,** including those experiencing homelessness or housing insecurity and those in need of supportive housing.

RAP currently serves approximately 6,700 households across Connecticut. However, rents have surged by 29% since 2021[1], and as a result the RAP program has a deficit of $5.6 million in this fiscal year.[2] Without additional funding, RAP will serve fewer families, even as Connecticut's 2024 Point-in-Time Count reported a 13% increase in homelessness—including a devastating 44% of those affected being children and older adults over 55.

[1] Apartment List, Historic Rent Estimates, January 9, 2024. https://www.apartmentlist.com/research/category/data-rent-estimates
[2] Fiscal Accountability Report FY25 – FY28, Office of Fiscal Analysis, November 2024, https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/FF/2025FF-20241120_Fiscal%20Accountability%20Report%20FY%2025%20-%20FY%2028.pdf

RAP certificates are a proven and vital tool to prevent homelessness. A flat budget allocation in the FY 2026/FY 2027 budget would result in fewer households served by RAP over time, at a time when thousands or residents need immediate housing subsidy to end or prevent the experience of homelessness.

**The Role of RAP in Addressing in our Housing Crisis**

Connecticut has a gap of approximately 92,500 affordable homes available to extremely low-income renter households (those earning 0-30% AMI). While building and preserving affordable housing is essential, development takes years and is costly—often encountering local resistance. Where does this leave the thousands of people experiencing housing instability? RAP provides an immediate, cost-effective solution to help low-income renters afford existing housing while new homes are developed across our state.

Federal rental assistance remains insufficient, with only 1 in 4 eligible renters receiving federal aid. As federal funding levels remain uncertain, Connecticut's RAP program is a critical tool to bridge this gap and provide much-needed rental stability.

**How RAP Works**

Modeled after the federally funded **Housing Choice Voucher Program**, Connecticut's RAP supports very low-income households by subsidizing a portion of their rent. Administered by the Department of Housing, households can use a RAP voucher in any community, in any home that meets quality standards, with any landlord that will participate. Assistance adjusts with changes in household income to keep families' rental payments affordable. Most families utilize rental assistance for just a few years, while others facing significant barriers have access to an affordable home instead of other costly systems.

For many, RAP vouchers are paired with wraparound services, known as supportive housing, to address any challenges the person or family is facing beyond housing affordability. RAP supports Connecticut's most vulnerable populations, including veterans, families involved in child welfare, high Medicaid utilizers, individuals exiting the justice system, and people transitioning from nursing homes.

**Proven Benefits of Rental Assistance Programs**

Decades of research confirm that rental assistance improves housing stability, reduces poverty, and enhances health and educational outcomes. Specifically, studies show:

- Housing vouchers are the most effective intervention for reducing family homelessness and increasing long-term stability.

- Nationally, housing vouchers lift over three million people above the poverty line, allowing families to afford necessities like food, medical care, and clothing.
- Renters without housing cost burdens spend significantly more on food and healthcare[3], improving overall well-being.
- Rental assistance helps close racial disparities—expanding vouchers would reduce poverty rates by: 33% for Latino households; 25% for Black households; and 20% for Asian, Pacific Islander, and Indigenous households.[4]
- Housing vouchers contribute to improved mental health, reduced domestic violence, and lower rates of food insecurity. They also promote educational stability by decreasing school absences, frequent moves, and behavioral issues in children.[5]

RAP is a proven, cost-effective tool that prevents homelessness and fosters economic mobility. A flat budget allocation in FY 2026 and FY 2027 would cause RAP to serve fewer households, just as Connecticut faces a rising homelessness crisis. Expanding RAP is not just an investment in housing, it is an investment in our families, workforce, and communities.

I urge you to fully fund an additional $20 million for RAP annually to ensure that Connecticut's most vulnerable residents have access to the stable, affordable housing they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Chelsea Ross
Executive Director
Partnership for Strong Communities

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[3] Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, October 2016, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/FamilyOptionsStudySummaryReport.pdf.
[4] Rental Assistance Lifts 3 Million People Above the Poverty Line, Center of Budget and Policy Priorities, https://www.cbpp.org/rental-assistance-lifts-3-million-people-above-the-poverty-line.
[5] Mazzara, Alicia, Expanding Housing Vouchers Would Cut Poverty and Reduce Racial Disparities, Center on Budget Policy Priorities, May 11, 2021, https://www.cbpp.org/blog/expanding-housing-vouchers-would-cut-poverty-and-reduce-racial-disparities.