

# CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING



## *At a Glance*

**Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Commissioner**

**Shante Hanks, Deputy Commissioner**

**Established – June 2012 via Public Act 12-1; fully implemented and funded July 2013**

**Statutory authority - Conn. Gen. Statutes Sec. 8-37r**

**Central office – 505 Hudson Street, Hartford, CT 06106**

**Number of employees – 45 and 1 Crumbling Foundations Homeowner Advocate who is funded through the state's Insurance Fund. Additionally, there are 3 more full-time staff members who are funded by the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority dedicated to supporting Connecticut's Coordinated Access Network (CAN) system.**

**Recurring operating expenses - \$16,510,475.82**

**Organizational structure – Office of the Commissioner, Legal, Individual & Family Support, Housing and Community Development, Policy Research and Housing Support, National Disaster Resilience/Rebuild by Design and CDBG-DR Superstorm Sandy**

## **Mission**

***The mission of the Department of Housing (DOH) is to ensure everyone has access to quality housing opportunities and options throughout the State of Connecticut.***

## **Statutory Responsibility**

Under the provisions of Conn. Gen. Statutes Chapters 50, 124b, 126a, 127c, 128, 129, 130, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137c, 137e, 138b, 138c, 138e, 138f, 138h, 138i, 138j, 298, 319i, 319y, 319uu, 412, 439, 541, 588x, 825, 828, and 833a, DOH is the lead state agency on all matters relating to housing and is responsible for advancing strategies and administering programs that promote the development, redevelopment, and preservation of housing for very low, low and moderate income families, community revitalization as well as financial and other support for our most vulnerable residents.

## **Public Service**

Fully operational for the last six years, DOH is a consolidation of housing and community development programs and staff from multiple state agencies, and is the lead agency for all housing matters in Connecticut. With all housing programs within one agency, the Department is able to provide leadership on the state's housing policy goals.

The Department is dedicated to assisting individuals with their housing needs. DOH's Individual & Family Support unit manages a must-answer information and referral line for state residents seeking assistance from one of the Department's support programs or with their unique housing problems. DOH's programs cover the

full spectrum of housing options in Connecticut; allowing individuals to access emergency shelter when necessary, and attain permanent supportive housing, affordable rental housing, or affordable homeownership.

DOH engages in public outreach and educational workshops to inform the public of its funding opportunities and assistance programs. Department staff hosted and participated in workshops and constituent fairs around the state, providing in-depth information on the agency's policies and programs. In addition, the DOH Commissioner continues to collaborate with local municipal and housing leaders to discuss ways in which the Department's initiatives can revitalize their neighborhoods and increase the provision of affordable housing for their residents.

The Department's open door policy encourages municipal leaders, public agencies, community groups, advocates, local housing authorities, as well as for-profit and non-profit housing developers to meet with Department leadership and staff to discuss their housing issues and needs.

In addition, the agency funds a rental housing locator service, which is free to the public, as well as provides leadership in implementing the coordinated access system statewide, which offers comprehensive assessments and referral services to meet the housing needs of vulnerable individuals and families. DOH also provides an online opportunity mapping tool that allows visitors to assess neighborhood statistics in each of Connecticut's federal census tracts.

### **Improvements/Achievements for Fiscal Year 2019-2020**

#### **Office of the Commissioner**

- Established and implemented an Affordable Housing Technical Assistance Grant, to assist communities in meeting their statutory obligations associated with affordable housing planning under Section 8-30j of the general statutes. Concurrently, it is working to create an Affordable Housing Toolkit and Guidebook which will provide a standardized process and methodology to assist communities identify their housing needs, and develop a municipally specific plan to address those needs.
- Continued to emphasize and improve ties to the nonprofit service community in order to better serve our citizen and non-citizen clients.
- Continued collaboration efforts amongst our for-profit and nonprofit development partners to identify opportunities for improved communication and interaction, in order to better serve our clients.

#### **Housing and Community Development**

- In the last year, the Department has created or preserved more than 2,700 affordable housing units. In addition, there are more than 4,205 additional units that are currently under construction, representing state investment of more than \$175,713,850, leveraging more than \$500,000,000 in private investment.
- Implemented a new Development Engagement Process, designed to identify projects that are ready for funding, and can be quickly in the ground, while beginning conversations to ensure that a pipeline of viable projects is on the horizon.

### **Policy, Research, and Housing Support**

- Continues to generate permanent, supportive housing units using the federal Section 811 Project-based Rental Assistance Program. This program has been used in both existing and new construction projects. Additionally, it has housed participants of Connecticut's Money Follows the Person program and homeless individuals from the Coordinated Access Network.

### **Individual and Family Support Programs**

- In FY 19-20, continued to expand on its federal resources to provide housing options to the State's most vulnerable households. Specifically, DOH applied to HUD and received 50 Mainstream Vouchers, which provides rental assistance to 89 households with a non-elderly disabled member, and DOH received \$10,797,000 from HUD for rental assistance to reduce homelessness across the state, including over \$1.7 million dedicated to provide rapid rehousing for victims of domestic violence.
- DOH continued to provide over 15,000 rental subsidies to low income households throughout the state through the federal Section 8 Program and the state funded Rental Assistance Program. Within each of these programs, DOH has been able to expand access to rent subsidies to households with disabilities, including those with mental health, substance abuse and developmental disabilities.
- DOH responded quickly to the novel Coronavirus pandemic. DOH determined the risk of poor outcomes of the homeless population sleeping in congregate settings who also have pre-existing conditions and responded with a massive homeless shelter de-concentration effort. This effort moved over 800 homeless individuals and families, or approximately 60% of the overall shelter census to hotels. Due to this effort, very few homeless individuals became sick with COVID. From the hotels, DOH implemented additional housing programs to move these households to permanent housing.

### **National Disaster Recovery/Rebuild by Design and Superstorm Sandy**

- DOH was awarded over \$159 million of CDBG-DR funds to assist homeowners, municipalities, and small businesses in their recovery from the damages of Superstorm Sandy. DOH is wrapping up the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program in a manner that protects homeowners, taxpayers, and the State from fraud, waste, and abuse.
- DOH continues to make significant progress under the National Disaster Recovery/Rebuild by Design activities. These activities, centered in Bridgeport, are moving toward completion, in cooperation with the City and other related partners, to make this area of the state more resilient to climate change.

### **Legal Unit**

- Provided educational training sessions and guidance concerning Connecticut's Rental Assistance Payments program (RAP) to caseworkers administering the program on behalf of DOH and to social service providers who assist tenants with supportive services in connection with their housing needs. The sessions addressed the obligations of tenants under the program

pursuant to regulatory requirements and program administrative rules, possible grounds for termination under the program, and the administrative fair hearing process for RAP participants.

- DOH legal staff worked with program staff and agency contractors to address the administration of RAP and the DOH-administered Section 8 program in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and devised mechanisms to ensure continued fairness and due process in denial and termination hearings for the programs in light of pandemic-related restrictions.
- Provided guidance to other state agencies and offices on landlord-tenant law, especially evictions, and provided legal guidance used to formulate gubernatorial executive orders, agency guidance and policies in order to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Responded to a higher than normal volume of citizen inquiries seeking guidance on eviction moratoria, landlord-tenant issues, and general housing related guidance.
- DOH's hearing officer conducted 48 hearings for individuals whose applications for RAP were denied or whose existing subsidies were terminated, and one hearing on the disposition of affordable housing under Connecticut General Statutes § 8-64a. DOH issued two decisions on the disposition of affordable housing under Connecticut General Statutes § 8-64a and one decision addressing claims under the Uniform Relocation Assistance Act.
- Successfully defended an action in Superior Court challenging the agency's issuance of a Declaratory Ruling under the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, an action brought by a RAP participant challenging a hearing officer termination decision and an action brought by a RAP participant alleging discrimination in the administration of the program, resulting in the dismissal of all three claims by the Superior Court.
- Worked with agency staff to modify and update administrative plans for subsidy programs to address cutting edge policy issues.
- Entered into numerous Memoranda of Understanding and Memoranda of Agreement with other state agencies to facilitate and ensure attainment of the state's housing policy goals.
- Continued to template grant and loan agreement documents to maximize efficiency in the contracting process.
- Trained all staff in state ethics, continued to provide ethics advice to staff on an as-needed basis.
- Handled the Freedom of Information Act responsibilities for the agency, which included responding to numerous requests for public records made pursuant to CT's FOI Act.