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STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

DATE: May 10, 2023

TO:

Chair Senator Jane Kitchel
Chair Representative Diane Lanpher
Senator Richard Westman
Senator Andrew Perchlik
Representative Theresa Wood
Representative Robin Scheu

FROM: Undersigned members of the House

RE: Pending crisis of mass unhousing

The mass eviction of 1800 households, more than 2500 people, is a humanitarian crisis. A crisis caused not by natural disaster, but by the willful indifference of a handful of leaders across state government making decisions that will unquestionably harm people. We know that the money is available to appropriate. This is a moral and political problem, not a money problem. We know that there is a better way forward. The legislature has an opportunity to create a humane transition plan for Vermonters facing an immediate loss of shelter as the COVID era rules for the General Assistance Emergency Housing program come to an end.

Expediting the placement process for individuals with chronic health issues and other needs is **not** a meaningful solution when there is still a concomitant crisis of capacity at long term care and skilled nursing facilities. These facilities lack enough beds or staff to support these individuals. Currently there are 125 patients waiting in hospitals because there is nowhere else to go. Hospitals are acutely aware that unhoused individuals enter emergency rooms for shelter, care, and food, and are currently preparing for the increased pressures from the sudden displacement of hundreds of Vermonters.

We call for this committee of conference to:

1. Immediately stop the plan to unhouse mass numbers of individuals and extend eligibility for Vermonters already enrolled in the GA Emergency Housing Program until the state creates a transition plan and/or other housing investments by budgeting an additional \$32 million to extend the program.
2. Create a plan to methodically transition Vermonters from the GA Emergency Housing Program to alternative longer term housing at the rate of 100-200 individuals per month, which reflects the current transition numbers and allows towns to adequately prepare to receive people in their communities.
3. Instruct the administration to renegotiate lower rates with motels/hotels and consider purchasing motel/hotel properties that would be suitable for mid- to long term housing while we continue to establish affordable housing across the state.
4. Allow an expansive list of vulnerable populations to access temporary housing. This would include, among other categories, individuals experiencing domestic violence, households with children under the age of 18 or a pregnant household member, and/or individuals with chronic health issues, severe mental health challenges, or substance use disorders.
5. Codify the Adverse Weather Conditions policy and expand the eligible weeks individuals can access the program from November 1 to May 1 each year.

Sincerely,

Rep. Mari Cordes, RN
Rep. Emma Mulvaney-Stanak
Rep. Caleb Elder
Rep. Monique Priestly
Rep. Connor Casey
Rep. Josie Leavitt
Rep. Kate Logan
Rep. Taylor Small
Rep. Saudia Lamont
Rep. Jubilee McGill
Rep. Mary-Katherine Stone
Rep. Michelle Bos-Lun
Rep. Jonathan Williams
Rep. Ela Chapin
Rep. Barbara Rachelson
Rep. Esme Cole
Rep. Kate McCann
Rep. Brian Cina
Rep. Mollie Burke

Rep. Angela Arsenault
Rep. Edye Graning
Rep. Troy Headrick
Rep. Heather Surprenant
Rep. David Templeman
Rep. Joseph Andriano
Rep. Michele Bos Lun
Rep. Brian Minier
Rep. Emilie Krasnow
Rep. Leonora Dodge
Rep. Jonathan Williams
Rep. Rey Garofano