



February 18, 2024

To the Senate Economic Development Committee,

I write on behalf of the Chittenden Asylum Seekers Assistance Network (CASAN), a volunteer non-profit in Chittenden County that assists people in our area who are in the lengthy legal process of seeking asylum. Thank you for this opportunity to share our experience about the proposed provisions regarding housing access for immigrant families.

We are one of seven grassroots groups in the state who have been assisting asylum seekers since 2019. Over the past years our network has discussed at length the barriers faced by the people we serve, and accessibility to housing is a key barrier. Securing housing is the first, basic step to staying in Vermont and beginning new lives in safety.

Since asylum seekers need to apply for asylum and then wait at least 180 days before receiving a work permit and employment SSN, our groups initially provide wrap-around assistance that includes housing, paid for by us mainly through donations from Vermont citizens who care about these new neighbors. Each group finds housing and has the rental agreements under our names or co-signed by a Board member, so that a person's Social Security number is not required. However, the indignity of others getting the housing for them is in itself an issue.

CASAN did experience the SSN barrier when working hard to try to find housing for a family of nine. We approached a landlord with many properties in Burlington, but even with the financial backing of our 501c3 and our commitment to vouch for and support this family, the landlord would not accept an application without their SSN.

This problem is faced all the time by so many other individuals and families who are not among the few assisted by our groups. Our partners in many service organizations report at our monthly meetings the difficulty their clients from other countries have finding housing, because they lack a SSN. Removing this requirement would make a huge difference in the lives of these people who are struggling to begin new lives in Vermont and who have so much to offer. They are eager to work and contribute and stay in Vermont, but they need places to live.

For all these reasons, we strongly support the provisions for immigrant families. Thank you for your consideration.

Jan Steinbauer, Chair
Chittenden Asylum Seekers Assistance Network
Resident of Underhill Center

casanvermont@gmail.com

PO Box 8045, Essex Junction, VT 05451

www.casanvermont.org