



**STATE OF VERMONT**  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

**MEMORANDUM**

**To:** Budget Conference Committee (H.494), Representative Diane Lanpher, Senator Jane Kitchel, Representative Robin Scheu, Senator Andy Perchlik, Senator Richard Westman, Representative Theresa Wood

**From:** House and Senate Progressive Caucus, Rep. Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, Rep. Taylor Small, Rep. Troy Headrick, Rep. Kate Logan and Sen. Tanya Vyhovsky

**Date:** May 4, 2023

**Subject:** General Assistance Emergency Housing Proposal

We appreciate the complexities of the task ahead of you as you work to find a final compromise on the FY24 state budget (H.494). At this point in the process, we want to make it clear to you that we cannot support a budget that will cause a humanitarian crisis in our state.

Approximately 1,800 Vermont households currently enrolled in the state's General Assistance Emergency Housing Program will have no viable housing options once the program abruptly ends. Each of these households will be exited in less than 60 days. The Administration has shown us time and time again that they do not and will not support Vermont's most vulnerable residents. We saw this happen last year when the Administration knowingly withheld information from the public and the legislature about the lack of FY23 funding for the program. The Administration then continued to undermine any effort to create a humane transition for these Vermonters. They failed us by refusing to propose any transitional programs that would allow these participants to move into long-term, sustainable housing. Instead, the Administration asserted that people would find alternative housing on their own and that the state's obligation is over. This is a dangerous and dehumanizing assertion. We, as state leaders, have an important responsibility to address the crisis before us and to do the right thing by funding the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program in the FY 24 budget. Providing nothing is unconscionable and inhumane.

Vermonters supported one another in innovative and humane-based ways during the pandemic. We understood during the pandemic that stable housing is a critical part of stabilizing people's lives during a time of turmoil and uncertainty. For many of these same Vermonters, their life circumstances remain tumultuous and uncertain due to mental and physical health needs, disabilities, sexual and domestic violence survival, and many more issues compounded by living in poverty.

We are at a crossroads. With an Administration that refuses to lead, the General Assembly becomes obligated to find a way to provide secure and safe shelter after July 1st for people experiencing homelessness while the state establishes new housing options in the coming year(s)?

We, the undersigned members of the General Assembly, call on the budget conferees to fully fund the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program and establish a humane-based policy in statute to support Vermonters until we develop long-term, supportive housing options. Those policy approaches include:

- In addition to the existing \$10 million for VHCB, allocate an additional \$76M to fully fund the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program, maintain the Covid-19 era eligibility requirements, and reinvest as much of this money as possible into motel conversions, mobile homes, and temporary shelters.
- Allocate \$10M to a Rapid Resolution Housing Initiative to support Vermonters currently in the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program with flexible parameters on housing support services needed by individuals, including supporting transportation, relocation costs, communal housing options, and other short-term solutions to housing.
- Change eligibility provisions for the Adverse Weather Conditions Program (Sec. E.321) to 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, mental health or substance use disorders.
- Codify the Adverse Weather Conditions policy (Sec. E.321) and expand the eligible weeks individuals can access the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program from November 1 to May 1.
- Allow current General Assistance Emergency Housing Program participants to remain in the program for an additional 84 days following the end of the Covid-19 era eligibility criteria.

Let us remember that our budget is an expression of our values as a state. This is a moral document. We trust that you will give these proposals serious consideration. Vermonters experiencing homelessness are counting on us.