

From H. 530 - Vermont State Fiscal Year 2014 "Big Bill"

Sec. E.321 HOUSING ASSISTANCE BENEFITS; FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM

(a) For state fiscal year 2014, the Agency of Human Services may continue a housing assistance program within the General Assistance program to create flexibility to provide these General Assistance benefits. The purpose of the program is to mitigate poverty and serve applicants more effectively than they are currently being served with the same amount of General Assistance funds. The program shall operate in a consistent manner within existing statutes and rules and new policies to be effective on July 1, 2013 and may create programs and provide services consistent with these policies. Eligible activities shall include, among others, the provision of shelter, overflow shelter, case management, transitional housing, deposits, down payments, rental assistance, upstream prevention, and related services that ensure that all Vermonters have access to shelter, housing, and the services they need to become safely housed. The assistance provided under this section is not an entitlement and may be discontinued when the appropriation has been fully spent.

(b) The program may operate in up to 12 districts designated by the Secretary of Human Services. The Agency shall establish outcomes and procedures for evaluating the program overall, and for each district in which the Agency operates the program, it shall establish procedures for evaluating the district program and its effects.

(c) The Agency shall continue to engage interested parties, including both statewide organizations and local agencies, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of the General Assistance flexibility program.

Sec. E.321.1 GENERAL ASSISTANCE EMERGENCY HOUSING

(a) Up to \$1,500,000 of the funds appropriated to the Agency of Human Services in the General Assistance program in fiscal year 2014 may be used for emergency housing in catastrophic situations, for the cold weather exemption, and, with supervisory approval, for vulnerable populations as defined in subsection (d) of this section, except in instances when:

(A) appropriate shelter space is available; and

(B) the recipient is responsible for his or her eviction, whether court-ordered or constructive, due to circumstances over which the individual had control.

(b) Except as described in subsections (a) and (c) of this section, the Agency may only provide General Assistance emergency housing benefits in catastrophic situations as defined in rules adopted pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25. All emergency and temporary housing policies and guidelines issued by the Agency in effect as of June 30, 2013 shall be rescinded, except that the

cold weather exemption issued by the Department for Children and Families' Economic Services Division dated October 25, 2012, and any succeeding amendments to it, shall remain in effect.

(c) The Department for Children and Families shall adopt emergency rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 844 to take effect July 1, 2013 that implement an eligibility system for emergency housing based on the physical health of and safety risks to vulnerable populations that do not have a catastrophic need. Emergency housing under the eligibility system shall be subject to available funds, supervisory review, and approval.

(d)(1) As used in this section, "vulnerable populations" means households with a member who is:

(A) 65 years of age or older;

(B) in receipt of or an applicant for either Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI);

(C) a child under six years of age; or

(D) in the third trimester of pregnancy.

(2) Eligibility for vulnerable populations shall be limited to 28 calendar days.

(3) Subdivision (1) of this subsection shall remain in effect until the eligibility system for emergency housing based on the physical health of and safety risks to vulnerable populations is adopted by the Department for Children and Families by rule pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

Sec. E.321.2 EMERGENCY HOUSING; REPORTS

(a) The Agency of Human Services shall develop the following systems with respect to General Assistance emergency housing services:

(1) an intake system for individuals and families receiving emergency housing services, including collecting basic statistical information about the clients served;

(2) a system to track payments to motels; and

(3) a system for ensuring the safety and health of clients who are housed in motels.

(b) On or before January 15, 2014, the Agency of Human Services shall report to the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs, and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations regarding the development and implementation of the systems required by subsection (a) of this section.

(c) On or before January 15 and July 15 of each year beginning in 2014, the Agency of Human Services shall report statewide statistics related to the use of emergency housing vouchers

during the preceding calendar half-year, including demographic information, deidentified client data, shelter and motel usage rates, clients' primary stated cause of homelessness, average lengths of stay in emergency housing by demographic group and by type of housing, and such other relevant data as the Secretary deems appropriate. When the General Assembly is in session, the Agency shall provide its report to the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs, and the House and Senate Committees on Appropriations. When the General Assembly is not in session, the Agency shall provide its report to the Joint Fiscal Committee.