

Testimony for Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs regarding  
Permanent Housing - 2/16/2023

Transitional housing isn't working. We need to make the shift to moving unhoused Vermonters to permanent housing; it will reduce many costs through many measures. However, will it resolve more solutions that it creates? I ask this as a renter in permanent housing in a crisis situation with no end in sight, so I do believe this issue does need to be addressed, but in concert with addressing others that will be addressed when ensuring there is permanent housing for currently unhoused Vermonters.

I'll use an example of a large rental non-profit agency in Chittenden County and beyond, Champlain Housing Trust (CHT). I'll posit one example of many; lack of oversight. Permanent housing is available; many tenants have been placed in units by caseworkers. However, as an outside viewer and fellow tenant, many are still in the throes of their addictions that likely led them becoming unhoused and appear to lose caseworker support once housed, violate their leases and lease violations are not enforced. Addiction is a disease and should be treated as such, but also much as my medical issues aren't my neighbor's responsibilities or curses, the effects of the tenants' addictions should be affecting myself and my ten year old son's mental and physical health. Concurrently, when the property manager has been made aware of the issues created by tenants placed here from transitional housing who choose to violate their leases, thereby violating my guarantee of peaceful enjoyment of my home and does nothing; what recourse is available for tenants like myself who reach out to CHT, the board that oversees CHT, CVOEO, the police, Legal Aid, a separate lawyer, my representative, my senators, as well as other representatives and senators and multiple media outlets, with no support or relief as they all get the same non-answers as I do, what do I do? Where is the oversight? And where will it be with the new plan for more permanent housing, because this is already a crisis level problem and cannot sustain more tenants without significant oversight overhaul.

I absolutely support permanent housing for all Vermonters. I would like to know what oversight will be in place, and how it will be enforced, because in my current experience, there is no oversight and CHT seems to have no interest in protecting tenants; that seems like an incorrect order of priorities. I'll also ask, because CHT chooses to house large numbers of the immigrant population, which is fantastic as they all do need good, safe homes. CHT doesn't provide that. This is a population that also historically won't report issues with other tenants or many building issues because although they came to our country because of what it stands for, I'm sure it's difficult to move past the fears of assault or worse for reporting something like that in the country they fled. We need to do better for them, and they are being used as pawns to keep tenants like myself and many others in unsafe, unhealthy, toxic and frankly illegal rental situations as they know we don't have another choice. And I'm writing this knowing I'm risking a no cause eviction, but I can't not say anything. So, yes, let's house all Vermonters, but we need stronger oversight for all rental properties and channels for recourse if we have legal issues, because if the permanent housing is damaging your family's health, what cost is the housing worth if we feel as though we have no way to feel comfortable, safe and proud of our own homes?

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