

Good afternoon respected members of the legislature. My name is Dan Coutu, from Newport City, and I am here today as a member of the Land Access and Opportunity Board. I am the appointee to the board of the Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs.

I'm asking for your support of the LAOB with an appropriation of \$1.97 million in fiscal year 2025 to provide support of our baseline operational expenses and to allow us to build on the momentum of our programming.

The LAOB is made up of a truly outstanding group of leaders from Vermont communities that have historically been marginalized and sometimes overlooked completely. Many have lived experience with the difficulties of obtaining access to housing and land. This brings very valuable, practical, experience to bear on the mission of the LAOB.

As you are all aware the state has a serious problem with being able to provide housing for our citizens. A recent VTDigger article from February 6th reports that Vermont has the second highest per-capita rate of homelessness in the country.

There are organizations that are seeking ways to help with addressing the short-term needs of our unhoused citizens and it is important that they continue to do their work. I see the responsibility of the LAOB to apply a different perspective with the goal of establishing long-term solutions.

There are three essential elements necessary for survival:

1. Water
2. Food
3. Shelter

The infrastructures for providing water and food are largely provided by the government. (Roads and water systems.)

It has been our observation that the existing systems by which people can obtain shelter have some significant flaws that can only be addressed by changing the systems. The LAOB has the unique mandate to review existing efforts related to housing and land and to recommend changes that will benefit our citizens and aid in their survival. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

Because of this I ask you to approve our requested budget.