



STATE OF VERMONT

MEMORANDUM

To: Rep. Martha Heath

From: Rep. Helen Head

Re: GHMA comments on FY15 budget

Date: March 15, 2014

General, Housing & Military Affairs appreciates the opportunity to weigh in on sections of the FY15 budget and acknowledges your very challenging work this year.

Sec. E.100 New Positions Requested

We recommend approval of the two classified positions in the Department of Public Safety: Fire Prevention Safety Officer and Electrical Inspector.

Sec. D.100 Property Transfer Tax

We recommend approval of the Governor's recommend for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

Sec.E.321 and E.321.1 Housing Assistance Benefits; Flexibility Program and General Assistance Emergency Housing

We commend the Agency of Human Services on its responsiveness to community comments related to program rules during the summer and fall of 2013. Harbor Place is especially welcome as a model of supported emergency housing. We also appreciate increased reporting on the part of the agency.

Our committee remains concerned about two emergency housing issues. The first involves the requirement that recipients pay 50% of their income to DCF when accessing emergency housing. This level of payment exceeds the HUD recognized guideline for maximum housing costs: 30% of income. It does not allow recipients to retain adequate income to meet other needs, including saving for a security deposit and first month's rent on permanent housing. We understand and appreciate that the Human Services Committee appears ready to pass a bill that would decrease the percentage of income required from participants.

We also remain concerned about the exclusion of families with school-age children over the age of seven. School age children of all ages need housing stability, including full access to emergency housing. The visible need of these families, and other vulnerable populations, may have not been apparent because of the significant number of cold weather exemption days declared this winter. However, we ask that the agency consider exceptions to this rule. Further, we request that the agency fully document the unmet need of families of school age children in their evaluation practices, including detail surrounding service denials of these families.

The committee supports exploring efforts to maintain the housing supports integral to the Pathways service model.