



vermont affordable housing coalition

March 11, 2014

Representative Helen Head
Chairperson
House General, Housing & Military Affairs Committee
State House
Montpelier, VT 05602

RE: Suggestions for the Composition of the Housing First Study Committee in H.791

Dear Rep. Head:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on H. 791, which we support wholeheartedly. As you have heard in testimony over the last several months, the Housing First model for alleviating homelessness among folks who have been chronically homeless and who suffer from severe and persistent mental health disabilities has been successfully adapted to Vermont's rural setting by Pathways Vermont, with many documented positive outcomes. We enthusiastically support this model, as well as Pathways' efforts to secure replacement funding for the \$800,000 in federal SAMHSA grants that are ending in October, which is one of the Coalition's legislative priorities for this year. This innovative model, which is increasingly becoming the preferred approach nationally for addressing chronic homelessness for people with mental health disabilities certainly deserves further study and support.

In addition to the committee members listed in H. 791, I would suggest representatives from:

1. Pathways Vermont
2. The Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness
3. The Vermont State Housing Authority
4. For-profit landlords
5. Non-profit landlords
6. The Office of Economic Opportunity
7. The Department of Mental Health
8. The Department of Corrections

There are certainly others who could add valuable perspectives to the study committee, but I would be reluctant to add to the already large number of potential members. I would also observe that the list of suggested committee members in H.791 is a bit top-heavy with legislators, though each committee suggested for representation certainly has jurisdiction over one or more aspects of the Housing First model.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Erhard Mahnke'.

Erhard Mahnke
Coordinator