

## **Emergency Shelter Options: How Different Regions of Vermont Address Their Respective Need**

Good Morning. My name is Angus Chaney and I serve as Director of Housing in the Agency of Human Services. Our agency strives to improve the health and wellbeing of Vermonters today and tomorrow and to protect those among us who are unable to protect themselves. The highest priority AHS housing effort is ending homelessness in Vermont. While we are engaged on multiple strategies to achieve this ambitious goal, including homelessness prevention programming, transitional housing, rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, and affordable housing through subsidies, my testimony today focuses on the critical issue of short-term emergency shelter for people needing a safe place to sleep, regroup and receive support while they develop a longer-term housing plan.

### **Context**

On any given night, approximately 1,454 Vermonters are without housing. While it is an over-simplification to offer a single explanation for this injustice, one of the most significant and stubborn factors is the disparity between the cost of rental housing and the incomes of Vermonters in low-wage jobs or receiving public benefits. Profiles of people who are homeless correspond to those of other people in poverty. Contrary to some notions of homelessness, over one third of Vermont's homeless population is under 20. Among the cohort staying in emergency shelters and emergency motel rooms, females now outnumber males.

### **Emergency Shelter Response**

In the 80's and 90's communities responded to an increased number of unsheltered homeless by creating emergency shelters. A majority of Vermont's shelters came into being during this era as the result of dedicated work by local grassroots and faith-based groups. As such, we see a diversity of approach from region to region in terms of program design and population served. Vermont's emergency shelters are non-profit organizations funded with private, state and federal sources. Almost all receive some level of funding from the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) program administered by the State Office of Economic Opportunity in the Department for Children and Families. HUD's promotion of its Homeless Continuum of Care model has brought increased standardization to the shelter network. In more recent years, HUD funding has been targeted less to the original emergency shelter providers and more towards permanent housing options. Theoretically, maximum ESG shelter capacity hovers around 450 beds. However, this assumes a scenario in which all beds and cribs in family rooms can be utilized and all seasonal shelters beds are available. A December 5<sup>th</sup> 2013 one night count of ESG providers found 368 persons in ESG emergency shelters and 265 persons in ESG-supported transitional beds. With only a few exceptions the shelter network is at capacity.

### **General Assistance Temporary Housing**

When local emergency shelter beds are filled, Vermonters seeking shelter are referred to the General Assistance (GA) Temporary Housing program. Eligibility is handled by the Economic Services Division with after hours and weekend coverage provided by Vermont 211. Eligibility for this program has been refined and debated in recent years as the division seeks to reconcile increased demand and expectations with finite budget authority.

From a policy perspective, AHS seeks to preserve existing emergency shelter bed capacity without creating additional shelters, and will work with community partners to reduce reliance on publicly-funded motels as a substitute for housing. In areas where the need for emergency shelter consistently exceeds supply, AHS will work with its partners to target alternative service models such as transitional housing, seasonal warming shelters, or supportive housing programs suited to the local need.

## **SEASONAL EMERGENCY SHELTER CAPACITY**

### **Seasonal Warming Shelters**

Seasonal warming shelters operate during winter months, typically November or December through March or April. Some remain open throughout that time and others (pop-up shelters) are activated during extreme weather. These shelters are typically open through the evening hours and people must leave the building during the day. Most seasonal warming shelters are sited in churches or on church property and are developed with commendable effort on the part of local faith-based and community groups. This model often relies on local volunteers supported by a volunteer coordinator. Most warming shelters are reserved for individual adults and are not considered optimum for families with children. Most seasonal shelters receive a small amount of grant funding through either the Emergency Solutions Grant or Community Housing Grants to help support volunteer coordination, insurance or utilities. Examples include:

- Brattleboro – Capacity 16 Beds
- North Springfield – Capacity 6 Beds
- Middlebury – Capacity 12 Beds
- Barre - Capacity 14 Beds
- Bennington – Capacity 12 Beds
- Bellows Falls (North Walpole, NH) – Capacity 10 Beds

### **Seasonal Overflow Capacity at Homeless Shelters**

Overflow capacity involves temporary expansion of emergency bed capacity during winter months or cold snaps. This typically entails setting up cots or sleeping rolls in first floor common space which is converted back to its customary use in the morning. Examples of shelters pursuing this option this winter include:

- White River – Upper Valley Haven
- St. Albans – Samaritan House

### **Hostel (Chittenden County)**

In 2013 the Department for Children and Families negotiated with a hostel in Burlington to secure beds for women and their children under age 12. This facility operates as a supportive shelter during the winter and has begun serving between six and 12 individuals during cold weather nights when local shelters are at capacity. In January 2014, the hostel averaged six adults per night. The cost of the Hostel is \$37 per night.

### **GA Temp Shelter Cold Weather Exemption**

During periods of extreme weather, eligibility criteria for the GA temporary housing program are relaxed to encourage the unsheltered homeless to seek safety indoors. During this time, shelters remain the first referral.

## **OTHER YEAR-ROUND ALTERNATIVES TO EMERGENCY SHELTER**

**Harbor Place (Chittenden County):** In November 2013 the Harbor Place transitional program began sheltering and serving families. The facility was opened under the management of Champlain Housing Trust with financial investments from DCF. These funds supported the renovation of the facility from its former use as a motel and secured access to 30 rooms at a cost of \$38 per room. This arrangement guarantees a minimum number of beds in Chittenden County at about 40% savings compared to motel costs. Community partners Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), Women Helping Battered Women (WHBW) and Safe Harbor have committed case management and other resources to help residents identify and address underlying needs and barriers to securing housing. Early in its operation there are many reasons for optimism that this model will not only save money but provide critical and timely services for families in need, reducing the likelihood these families will need GA housing support in the future. On warmer nights, DCF expects to use 25-30 rooms. During cold weather, DCF uses all 30 contracted rooms, plus the additional 20 paid rooms at \$28/night.

**Transitional and SRO Units:** The Open Door Mission (Rutland County) begins with a shelter for homeless individuals on the ground floor and provides longer-term single room occupancy units (SROs) upstairs. This creates an option more like a rental unit for residents with longer-term needs or who benefit from some moderate level of structure and support. Many other Vermont programs which began solely as emergency shelter have since added some form of transitional housing. Examples include:

- Morningside (Brattleboro)
- John Graham Shelter (Bristol and Vergennes)
- Samaritan House (St. Albans)
- Spectrum (Burlington)
- COTS (Burlington)
- Bennington Coalition for the Homeless (Bennington County)
- NEKYS (St. Johnsbury)
- Women Helping Battered Women (Burlington)
- Voices Against Violence (St. Albans)
- Rutland County Women's Network (Rutland)

### **Subsidy Programs and Supportive Housing targeted to homeless families and individuals:**

Rental subsidies such as the **Vermont Rental Subsidy Program** and **Transitions to Housing** provide affordable housing targeted to people who are homeless. Targeting this type of housing program gets people into homes and out of shelters and motels freeing up capacity and services for those who need them. Programs such as **Family Supportive Housing** and **Pathways Vermont** (Housing First), offer intensive services to homeless families and individuals who rent conventional apartments, often with some form of rental assistance attached.

At this time I'm happy to take any questions or suggestions.

**Emergency Shelter Capacity Supported by ESG and CHG - (2014 Estimate):**

Area Served Town, County, Region	Grantee	Housing Resource or Population Served
Addison County	John Graham Shelter	25 emergency beds + 5 rooms + services
Addison County	Sub-Grant Through CVOEO	12 Seasonal Beds
Bennington County	Bennington Coalition for the Homeless	5 rooms of emergency shelter for families & services + 12 seasonal beds + transitional housing
Bennington County	PAVE	18 emergency beds (4 units) (domestic violence)
Brattleboro; Windham County	Brattleboro Area Drop-In	Day Shelter (and 25 Seasonal Overflow shelter beds for families and individuals)
Caledonia County	NEKYS	10 transitional beds (youth)
Caledonia County	NEKCA	12 emergency beds + services (individuals and families)
Chittenden County	COTS	36 emergency beds (individuals, Waystation), Daystation, 63 emergency beds/15 rooms (families)
Chittenden County	Spectrum	8 emergency beds + services (Youth)
Chittenden County	Women Helping Battered Women	13 emergency beds, 5 cribs + services; services for those in motel units (Domestic Violence)
Franklin & Grand Isle Counties	Samaritan House	16 emergency beds (individuals) + services (Individuals & families) + Seasonal Overflow Beds
Franklin & Grand Isle Counties	Voices Against Violence	9 emergency beds & services (Domestic Violence)
Lamoille County	Clarina Howard Nichols Center	12 emergency beds (domestic violence)
Northeast Kingdom	Umbrella	3 emergency beds (domestic violence)
Rutland County	Open Door Mission	26 emergency beds and 25 transitional beds/units (adults only)
Rutland County	Rutland Co. Women's Network	13 Emergency beds (5 rooms) and 2 transitional units (domestic violence)
Springfield Region	Springfield Warming Shelter	6 Beds
Washington County	Circle	12 emergency beds, 1 transitional unit + services (domestic violence)
Washington County	Good Samaritan Haven	16 emergency beds (individuals)
Washington County; Statewide	Sexual Assault Crisis Team (SACT)	12 emergency beds (4 rooms) (Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault)
Windham and Windsor Counties	Greater Falls Warming Shelter	10 emergency beds for individuals
Windham County	Morningside House	24 emergency beds + services (families and individuals)
Windham County	Women's Freedom Center	13 emergency beds (domestic violence)
Windsor and Orange Counties	Upper Valley Haven	20 emergency beds (individuals) + services & 8 emergency rooms + services (Families)
Windsor County	Windsor County Youth Services	4 emergency beds - Mountainside & 20 Mile Stream (Youth)
Statewide	Dodge House	7 transitional beds (Veterans)
Statewide	VCRHYP	49 beds in 4 transitional living programs (Youth)

<b>Domestic Violence</b>
<b>Youth</b>
<b>Seasonal</b>
<b>Veterans</b>
<b>General</b>