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Agency of Human Services
Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs
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H.791: Housing; Housing First; study committee

Good Morning. My name is Angus Chaney. 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.

Scope - In earlier testimony in the committee of jurisdiction, AHS suggested broadening the legislative “Housing First” study to a “Supportive Housing” study to:

- Allow inclusion of reports from rural states (such as Maine) that have reached conclusions on similar models which may not strictly be defined as “housing first;”
- Move the focus from a specific provider or philosophy to a broader model of housing with supportive services for the homeless;
- Allow for an assessment of housing costs and availability in addition to service costs.

There seems to have been support for this approach, but we have picked up another ambitious charge, to *“evaluate and investigate the causes and conditions of chronic homelessness in Vermont, and propose solutions to providing stable and safe housing that individuals may afford”* Adding this to the scope takes it far beyond what a summer study can realistically accomplish in this time frame. The Agency Of Human Services recommends this sentence be struck, not because it is unimportant, but because it is *too* important to rush through within the parameters proposed in the bill and without representation from across state government in areas such as economic development and minimum wage.

Forum - This week you’ve heard testimony from at least one witness who suggested moving the study to another group, such as the Council on Homelessness. The Council on Homelessness is not designed to have analytic capacity such as that provided by JFO and would struggle with the same perceived lack of objectivity that some have alluded to around the composition of the committee in H.791. The Agency Of Human Services does not support assigning the study to the Council on Homelessness due to a lack of capacity for this work.

Analysis - Assuming the goal of the study is to bring objective analytic information back to the legislature to inform future allocation discussions, AHS recommends establishing at the outset what metrics will be used to measure efficacy, cost and impact of Supportive Housing rather than leave this to a group which - no matter how carefully composed and balanced - will struggle against a perception of partiality. Some suggestions, assuming there is access to these metrics, are:

- Housing stability of supportive housing participants at 3, 6 and 12 months;
- Percent of participants who experience additional episodes of homelessness, institutionalization or incarceration after leasing up in a supportive housing program;
- Documented savings realized as a result of diversion from higher-cost institutions;

- Service costs of primary and secondary service providers;
- Costs for municipalities;
- Cost of creating additional housing units dedicated for this model;
- Cost of providing rental assistance.

Lastly, rather than risk drifting into a large body of data relating to housing and homelessness, AHS recommends that the scope be established at the outset as synthesizing reports and data from a finite number of key models, namely:

- SAMHSA analysis of Pathways Vermont Housing First demonstration augmented with information gathered by the state;
- A 2009 “Rural Cost of Homelessness” report from the State of Maine;
- Any reports available for Utah’s Housing First model;
- An innovative Medicaid-funded supportive housing program under development in the Bronx.

At this time, I’m happy to take any questions.