

November 13, 2014

Governor Peter Shumlin
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Governor Shumlin:

Poor Vermonters, including families with children, are in crisis.

People are working. Even among the homeless, those who are able hold one or two jobs. Wages are low. For those who can't work, public benefits cover less than 50% of the cost of living. Housing is expensive and scarce. Too many families struggle under the shadow of deep trauma: violence, abuse, and sexual predation. This suffering -- sometimes sharpened by mental illness and addictions -- places too many at risk for harm. But the pain goes deeper than that of being hungry or cold. It's about the desolation of being left behind.

The conditions that create poverty are many, entwined and not to be solved simply by more funding. It's time for the prevailing silo approach to state poverty programs to give way to new, more collaborative efforts. Your Council on Pathways from Poverty has met steadily over the past year to recommend strategies that will help low-income and vulnerable Vermonters both manage *and* move out of poverty. Revenues are not robust and so this Council offers a menu of innovations and policy initiatives, along with the prudent, return-yielding investments needed to see them through. Our highest priorities follow; our comprehensive, longer term recommendations are attached.

INNOVATIONS

1. ***Harness the "collective impact" model*** to implement structured collaborative efforts that achieve real change to the problems of poverty and inequity. You have already tapped this approach to battle addictions, and communities in the Northeast Kingdom are using it to combat poverty. Use your office to bring together the disparate efforts and funding streams of state government to create integrated collaborations that will ***house the homeless, transport low-income workers, and create real economic development for people most in need.***
2. ***Use capital investments to grow jobs and protect and create housing.*** Vermont has a significant need to refurbish its existing stock of affordable housing and to create more, especially for those with very low incomes. Create good construction jobs and increase production of permanently affordable housing by providing full, statutory funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board at \$17.75 million. And while interest rates are still low, preserve existing assisted housing at-risk of losing its affordability by investing in State Capital Bond funds each year for the next four years.
3. ***Harness new resources to fight poverty by directing health care funding to housing and services*** for people who are frequent users of Medicaid and other health care services.

PRUDENT INVESTMENTS

We urge you to make targeted, strategic increases to key programs that reduce suffering and harm -- and promote wellness, achieve savings, create jobs, increase revenues and grow the local economy:

1. **Continue to build on past successes in reducing homelessness and cut reliance on motels for emergency housing** by appropriating a total of an additional \$1.25 million for: Emergency Solutions Grants (\$400,000), the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program (\$500,000), and Family Supportive Housing Program (\$350,000).
2. **Create new jobs, build assets, and promote financial skills** by increasing investments in Micro Business (\$200,000) and Individual Development Accounts (\$200,000); establishing a Vermont Matched Savings Program (\$135,000); and funding Financial Coaching, Credit Repair and Banking programs (\$175,000). These investments will restore and enhance economic opportunities for low-income families.
3. **Increase Reach Up Grants.** Continue working to reduce or eliminate benefit cliffs, including application of income disregards and elimination of asset tests – **start by putting this year’s benefit cliff improvements into next year’s budget.**
4. **Increase investment in Vermont’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program** by raising the base rate to 50% of the current market rate, with the long-term goal of raising the base to 75% of the current year market rate and raising eligibility for the program to 300% of the federal poverty level, while mandating that rates and guidelines be adjusted annually and kept current.
5. **Increase investment in the Low-Income Weatherization Program,** increase LIHEAP grant assistance and fully fund Crisis Fuel needs.
6. Budget resources to **implement the Transitional Benefits Alternative** that provides 3SquaresVT benefits for five additional months to households after they leave Reach Up.

POLICY INITIATIVES

1. **Establish a “culture of kindness”** within the Agency of Human Services and the Department for Children and Families to ensure that individuals applying for, or receiving, assistance are welcomed, well served and treated with respect.
2. **Separate program enforcement** from eligibility determinations and service delivery, especially in the area of Child Protection Services.
3. **Establish an independent Office of Child Advocate.**
4. **Establish a goal for owners of publicly funded housing** to dedicate 10% of their affordable housing portfolio to homeless families and individuals.
5. **Complete a high-level study of transportation issues affecting low income people** that examines existing vehicle and ridership programs, public transportation, and regulations relating to fines, fees and repairs that are barriers.
6. **Preserve property tax income sensitivity** for low and moderate income tenants by maintaining the Renter’s Rebate at the current formula level.

Thank you for inviting us to make these recommendations. We’ve included more detail in the attached report.

For the Council on Pathways from Poverty,



Linda Ryan, Co-Chair



Christopher Curtis, Co-Chair

**REPORT TO THE
GOVERNOR
FROM THE COUNCIL ON
PATHWAYS FROM POVERTY**

November 2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committee Recommendations

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Administrative Systems | 5 |
| What will change look like? | 6 |
| Economic Empowerment and Opportunity | 7 |
| Employment, Assets & Financial Education | 7 |
| Transportation | 7 |
| Child Care Financial Assistance Program | 8 |
| Interagency Partnerships | 9 |
| Employment Policy | 9 |
| Tax Policy | 9 |
| Housing and Homelessness | 10 |
| Safety Net | 13 |
| Reach-Up | 13 |
| Food Security | 14 |
| General Assistance | 14 |
| LIHEAP, Weatherization & Crisis Fuel | 14 |
| Affordable Healthcare, Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Treatment Programs | 15 |
| <u>Attachments</u> | |
| Accomplishments 2013-2014 | 16 |
| Executive Order No. 09-13 | 17 |
| Members of the Governor’s Council on Pathways from Poverty | 19 |

Administrative Systems

Poor Vermont families with children are in crisis. Wages are low and public benefits cover less than 50% of the cost of living. Housing is expensive and scarce. Too many families struggle under the shadow of deep trauma: violence, abuse, and sexual predation. This suffering, often sharpened by mental illness and addictions, places children and their parents at intense risk for harm or mortality. The recent untimely deaths of infants and toddlers have touched each of us, and we know Vermont must do better. The Committee on Administrative Services of the Governor's Council on Pathways from Poverty considered these issues for the past year. Most of the members are involved in direct service and engaged intensively with families on the local level. We also held two public hearings and offered an anonymous survey to those unable or unwilling to speak out. Our recommendations for changes to services for families with children fall into five essential areas:

1. **Provide Integrated Family Services** that offer wraparound teams, including resources and interventions for families, based on a vulnerability index. We believe that silos are for farms, not families; and thus strongly recommend against dividing the Department of Children and Families (DCF), but instead suggest:
 - a. DCF separate the functions of service coordination and enforcement, and thus provide for prevention and support, but also for rapid intervention when children are at risk;
 - b. DCF improve collaboration and resource allocation to community partners with expertise in prevention, parenting, early childhood development, harm reduction and family support. For example, in many communities the Parent Child Center is the hub of support, and its services deserve to be sustained through grants and Medicaid reimbursement.
2. **Establish a culture of kindness, respect and accountability** throughout DCF and the Agency of Human Services.
3. **Improve communication and transparency** with families, community partners and the general public by lifting secrecy when prudent, and by improving and integrating information technology systems with community partners.
4. **Provide adequate system-wide resources to keep children safe**, including resources within DCF, for community partners, and for the Judiciary.
5. **Establish independent oversight and accountability** over DCF, either through creating an Office of Child Advocate, or through empowering community partners.
6. **Harness the "collective impact" model** to implement structured collaborative efforts that achieve real change to the problems of poverty and inequity. You have already tapped this approach to battle addictions, and communities in the Northeast Kingdom are using it to combat poverty. Use your office to bring together the disparate efforts and funding streams of state government to create integrated collaborations that will **house the homeless, transport low-income workers, and create real economic development for people most in need.**

What will change look like?

- Services for children and families are integrated with increased teaming and collaboration. The philosophy and framework are guided by Vermont's existing initiative on "Strengthening Families." The approach is strengths-based, person-centered, flexible and collaborative.
- The functions of service and enforcement are separated. Families no longer distrust and fear the agency and department set up to serve them.
- All interactions with families are based on respect, kindness, and clear outcome measures for accountability.
- DCF has adequate staff and resources to accomplish its mission. For example, staff members make home visits and follow up as needed, return calls in a timely manner, keep appointments, and answer questions with candor.
- Multi-disciplinary teams work at the local level and include representatives from all necessary services. DCF designates a lead service professional to coordinate the communication and planning for each family.
- DCF staff and community partners provide a full array of family supports including stable housing, treatment and recovery services, parenting, and financial literacy and asset development. Community partners have adequate resources to do the job.
- DCF staff members and teams work with no more than 25 families.
- DCF staff members are trained to work with people who have experienced trauma. They are trained to handle vicarious trauma, and they receive strong support and supervision.
- Resources and services are flexible, timely, designed around a family's schedule and are provided in homes or safe environments.
- Families have ready access to trauma treatment, mental health counseling, and addictions treatment -- including medication-assisted treatment.
- DCF's information technology, reporting, documentation, and regulatory structures are designed to support and serve the values of integrated family services.

Economic Empowerment and Opportunity

Employment, Assets & Financial Education

Invest in proven strategies for creating financial stability and building financial capability with four successful and underfunded, cost effective programs to address economic inequity.

1. **Increased funding for the Micro Business Development Program.** MBDP provides free business technical assistance (training and counseling) to low income Vermonters and has since 1989. The Vermont Community Action Agencies work in conjunction with many partners including social service agencies, state agencies, other business technical assistance providers and lenders, both alternative and traditional. In FY 2013, 90 businesses were started and jobs created at the approximate cost of \$3,200 per business. \$300,000 BASE FUNDING (Increase \$100K-\$200K above base)
2. **Increased funding for Individual Development Accounts (IDA)** - A matched savings and financial education program that helps low to moderate income Vermonters get ahead and improve their futures through creating financial assets. Backed by federal dollars participants save to purchase a home, pay tuition for post-secondary education, or start a business. Since its start in 1997 the program has served over 1,335 individuals and families. \$135,500 BASE (Increase \$100K-\$200K above base)

Both the MPDP and the IDA programs were reduced during the FY 2010 rescissions and have not been restored.

3. **Development of a Vermont Matched Savings Account (Expanded IDA)** - A matched savings program backed by state dollars for Vermonters with low income to overcome barriers to poverty coupled with financial coaching and classes. Examples of plans for saving: purchase or repair of a vehicle, paying down debt, maintaining dental health, establishing an emergency fund, and expenses, like tools or training, that support employment or housing success. (New funding of \$100K- \$135K Base)
4. **Fund the credit building and repair products** - To break poverty barriers: Credit repair coaching for Vermonters with low income to repair/build credit, and repair/strengthen their connections to financial institutions, and to provide access to and funding assistance for safe and affordable, secured credit cards and other credit-building products. Program can be targeted to Reach-Up Families (\$150K - \$200K to cover cost of existing service and expand availability)
5. **Consider funding these programs from DOL, DHCD, DOC and DOT** because of their connection to business creation and development and transportation.

Transportation

Create a comprehensive Study on transportation gaps and opportunities for the low income population, examine current practices, fees, and restrictions that result in transportation barriers and create more consumer protections and resources in the Attorney General's office.

1. **Create and fund a study committee on transportations issues on a large scale for the low income population.** For many low income Vermonters transportation is the linchpin by which they succeed or fail. While Reach Up has processes in place to assist some consumers, thousands more remain unemployed or underemployed for lack of transportation at great cost to the state. The study should include: an examination of existing vehicle and ridership programs, public transportation, and current regulations relating to fines, fees and repairs, and policies that continue to be a transportation barrier for low income Vermonters.
2. **Establish a DMV process for a “restricted license”** to permit a driver whose license is suspended due to driving an uninspected, unregistered or uninsured motor vehicle to drive to work, school or medical appointments (specifically excluding criminal offenses such as DUI). Qualifiers could include: first-time offenders, corrected violations, consumers who have paid their fines or have a payment plan in place, drivers over the age of 18, etc. The restricted license could also be issued in the case of non-payment of fines if there was a financial hardship.
3. **Continue to advocate for the increase or removal of the “asset test”** to allow consumers to retain large tax refunds that would make it possible for them to maintain their transportation. Currently Reach Up participants who receive a large tax refund need to liquidate it or face loss of benefits. As a result Reach Up often pays for car repairs the consumer may have been able to afford if they’d been able to keep their tax refund.
4. **Provide additional resources for the Attorney General’s Office to assist consumers who enter into predatory lending schemes,** or who have encountered difficulty with unfair vehicle repossession practices, etc. Many low income consumers who purchase cars with high-interest, fee packed loan that they simply cannot afford. In some cases consumers commit more than 50% of their income to the payment. Credit is ruined; they are faced with threatening repo processes and no means to extricate themselves.
5. **Allow Reach Up case managers to pay for funds or repairs that exceed the \$850 cap** for consumers who are under the Federal Poverty Level and cannot get their car inspected due to a major emissions repair such as a catalytic converter. **Create a loan program for these expensive repairs and/or allow for a waiver for one year** in the case of an older vehicle that is road worthy but does not meet EPA standards.

The Vermont Matched Savings program would allow for families to save money that would be matched and could be used for a car purchase and/or repair (one of the uses for the Matched Savings recommendation on page one).

Child Care Financial Assistance Program

Provides working families with the financial support needed to obtain quality child care, assuring family economic stability, while providing young children with early learning opportunities that establish a sturdy foundation for future growth and development

1. **Increase investment in Vermont’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) by:**
 - **Raising the base financial payment for all child care providers to 50% of the current market rate,** with the long-term goal of raising the base to 75% of the current year market rate.

- **Raising eligibility for CCFAP to 300% of the federal poverty level.** Families receiving payments from the Child Care Financial Assistance Program are subject to a benefit cliff that starts at 100% of the federal poverty level and ends with zero eligibility at 200% of the federal poverty.
- **Mandating that market and Federal Poverty Level guidelines used to determine payments and eligibility** for CCFAP be adjusted annually and kept current.

Interagency Partnerships

1. **Assess interagency coordination and cooperation** on poverty issues and funding sources.
2. **Increase the existing workforce training and education resources** to specifically target the low income population and explore previously successful partnership between the VT Department of Labor and Reach Up on employment issues.
3. Increase use of School Technical Education Centers.

Employment Policy

1. **Support Paid Sick Days Legislation (Earned Sick Days).** This Legislation would ensure that all workers have the ability to earn sick time for personal or family health reasons without the loss of pay.
2. **Support Paid Family Leave Legislation for Vermont Families.**
3. **Increase funding for work supports for people with disabilities** and reduce regulatory barriers that discourage people with disabilities from engaging in meaningful work.

Tax Policy

1. **Expand the Earned Income Tax Credit.**
2. **Preserve and Protect the Renter's Rebate at current levels.** This is an \$8.5 million dollar program that provides income sensitivity for renters who pay property taxes through their rent. This program functions like a "housing EITC" (Earned Income Tax Credit) and helps prevent homelessness by helping families stay current on rent and utilities.

Housing and Homelessness

Safe, stable and affordable housing is a basic need if all Vermonters are to lead healthy, productive lives. Without a home, children have difficulty learning in school; elders and people with disabilities live less independently; single mothers on Welfare cannot move off government assistance; and low-wage workers have difficulty holding onto jobs, let alone moving up the economic ladder. Lack of affordable housing is the single largest contributor to homelessness. It is one of the most important -- perhaps THE most important -- factor in moving Vermonters out of poverty. Investments in affordable housing and supportive services help avoid costs throughout the human services budget, from health care to Corrections, mental health, nursing homes, and motels, among others. Investments in housing increase state and local revenues and spending in the local economy. They help attract and retain employers by providing housing for working Vermonters.

We are making four basic kinds of recommendations that are essential to help meet the housing needs of low-income Vermonters:

1. **Capital subsidies** to build and/or acquire and rehabilitate permanently affordable housing;
2. **Operating subsidies** to help fill the gap between what low-income Vermonters can afford and (a) what's available on the open market and (b) the cost of housing assisted with capital subsidies alone; and
3. **Supportive services** needed for people with special needs to successfully acquire and retain stable housing.
4. **Policies** that assure that people with special needs, including those who are homeless and struggling with diverse challenges, have greater access to publicly funded housing.

In making the following short and long-term recommendations, the Housing and Homelessness Subcommittee of the Governor's Council on Pathways from Poverty focuses on the housing needs of very low-income Vermonters, with priority for the needs of homeless people and those with extremely low-income.¹ The overarching goal is to create a seamless continuum of options for all levels of housing need, from emergency shelters to affordable rentals to homeownership. Collectively, they address the affordable housing and related supportive service needs of Vermonters in these cohort groups: (1) households in situational crisis or transitional poverty (e.g., job loss or spike in expenses); (2) people with long-term disabling conditions that affect their ability to accumulate resources; and (3) those having long-term lack of access to resources for building economic and social capital:

- **Increase production of permanently affordable housing** by providing full, statutory funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, estimated at \$17.74 million from the Property Transfer Tax,² a \$2.78 million increase.
- **Invest \$15 million in State Capital Bond funds** each year for four years, leveraging federal tax credits and other public resources, to:
 - Preserve existing assisted housing at-risk of losing its affordability and/or in need of new capital investments;

¹ Very low-income is defined by HUD as at or below 50% of the Area Median Income, \$34,400 statewide for a four-person household in 2014. Extremely low-income is defined as at or below 30% of AMI, \$20,650 for a four-person household.

² Based on the "July 2014 Economic Review and Revenue Forecast Update" by Kavet, Rockler & Associates.

- Create more transitional and permanent supportive housing for Vermonters who are homeless, vulnerable or have other special needs;
 - Improve thermal efficiency in existing affordable housing to increase its sustainability; and
 - Help move families from rental to homeownership.
- Establish a goal for owners of publicly funded housing to ***dedicate 10% of their affordable housing portfolio to homeless families and individuals***, including those with special needs who require service supports to maintain their housing.
 - Charge all housing funders, including the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Agency of Human Services, Department of Housing and Community Development, Vermont Housing Finance Agency, and the Vermont State Housing Authority, with assuring that the 10% goal is achieved. VHCB, through its organizational and project-based grant making activities, and AHS, through its contracts with community based service providers, shall assure that community based organizations meet the goal. VHFA and VSHA shall work with private owners of section 8 housing to build relationships with homeless service providers.
 - The Governor should issue an executive order charging AHS, ACCD, VHCB, VHFA, VSHA and their community partners with development of an MOU that breaks down any silos that hinder access to housing. Further an MOU among these agencies and state regulatory agencies should be developed to improve permitting for new affordable housing.
- ***Continue to invest in programs that prevent and alleviate homelessness***, while reducing reliance on motels for emergency housing. For FY 2016:
 - Increase the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program from \$1 to \$1.5 million. Look at possible policy changes to make the program more useful to a broader range of low-income Vermonters and to decrease the time from application to lease-up.
 - Increase the Family Supportive Housing Program from \$600,000 to \$950,000, expanding the program from five to seven counties and enhancing the first three successful programs. Expand the program statewide by FY 18.
 - Increase Emergency Solutions Grants from \$1.1 to \$1.5 million.
 - Sustain funding for welcoming, safe and respectful seasonal warming shelters that include engagement and support services where the need is demonstrated. These shelters have become an essential part of Vermont's emergency shelter system and provide a less expensive alternative to motels.
 - Increase eligibility for Community Housing Grants from 30% of Area Median Income to 50% to stabilize at-risk households and prevent them from spiraling into homelessness while helping to leverage private funds.
 - Examine whether Chittenden County's successful Harbor Place model can be replicated in other areas of the state.
 - Examine whether the Department of Corrections, as part of its Transitional Housing Program, should provide rental assistance to ex-offenders coming out of prison to enhance their chances of success in the community and reduce recidivism.

- **Divert health care expenditures to housing and services** for people who are frequent users of health services. Devise a strategy for utilizing Medicaid to fund housing and supportive services for extremely low-income Vermonters, especially the homeless, at risk, people with disabilities, and families on Reach Up.
- **Enable Vermonters living with disabilities to live more independently** and avoid the higher expense of living in a nursing home by investing an additional \$200,000 in the Home Access Program annually to reduce the waiting list to six months. Current funding is approximately \$675,000 a year and could be increased by leveraging Global Commitment funds.
- At a minimum, **maintain current funding levels** for other proven programs that:
 - Prevent and reduce homelessness, including Community Housing Grants, Department of Mental Health housing assistance programs, Corrections Transitional Housing, Pathways Vermont/Housing First, DCF housing pilots, Harbor Place, and Transitions to Housing.
 - Provide supportive services to help very low-income Vermonters maintain stable housing in more independent settings, including Support and Services at Home (SASH), Vermont's home-sharing programs, Housing Assistance for Persons with HIV/AIDS, AHS Youth Development Program, the Vermont Department of Health's Alcohol & Drug Assistance Program Sober housing and halfway houses, Assistive Community Care Services (ACCS), and Enhanced residential Care (ERC).
 - Invest State tax credits in affordable housing for very low-income Vermonters, including the Vermont Affordable Housing Credit, Charitable Housing Credit, Qualified Sale of a Mobile Home Credit, and Downtown and Village Center Program Tax Credits.
- **Increase State advocacy for federal resources** across the board, including all HUD and USDA Rural Development capital funds for creating affordable housing, as well as rental assistance and project based operating subsidies for the lowest income people. The Governor should use his position with the Democratic Governor's Association and other national groups to elevate the importance of affordable housing and ending homelessness. Specifically, the Governor should support (1) federal reauthorization of the New Markets Tax Credit and applications for additional resources for Vermont, (2) converting part of the private activity bond cap to Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and (3) fixing the rates of the 4% and 9% tax credits.
- **Increase rental housing safety** by creating a public/private system to increase compliance with Vermont's Rental Housing Health and Safety Code.

Safety Net

Reach-Up

Increase the Reach-Up Grant to meet 100% of the standard of need.

To pull themselves out of deep poverty a family must have enough to meet basic needs. The current Reach Up grant meets only approximately 49% of the basic need standard. The State has recently introduced time limits to restrict access to the program. What it has *not* done is keep pace with the needs of those Vermonters eligible and receiving benefits. Failure to do so limits the ability of families to successfully graduate from the program and move to economic independence. Most recipients of Reach Up are children, whose families need enough cash income to buy essentials of life including non-food grocery items, clothes, diapers, utilities, costs of transportation and many more. Grants must be adjusted upward to deal with the economic reality of increasing rents, food, and transportation costs that are all essential to work readiness.

If adjusting grants to reflect 100% of the standard of need is not feasible due to budget constraints, then we recommend modest upward adjustments to the Reach Up standard of need to increase grants – either in the form of step increases or pegged to inflation or the consumer price index. Reach Up families are working families. The State of Vermont has mandated increases to the minimum wage (up to \$10.50), indexed to inflation after 2019. By contrast, Reach Up families have been subjected to a net 27.8% decrease in inflation-adjusted dollars since 1996, resulting from stagnant grant amounts. Providing modest upward adjustments to reflect the costs of working while on the program is not only the right thing to do to help families successfully graduate from the program, preserve housing and create opportunities for low-income families, but is long overdue.

Continue to reduce or eliminate benefit cliffs in public benefit programs, including Reach Up, 3SquaresVT, and Child Care Financial Assistance. Application of income disregards and elimination of asset tests where shown to be effective and feasible.

- Fully fund legislative policy changes for FY'16 in Governor's budget (increase in earned income disregard, Reach Ahead, child care subsidies).
- Continue to work to increase the earned income disregard for Reach Up families.
- Eliminate or expand the asset limit for Reach Up families.
- Investigate the feasibility of an earned Income disregard for the Child Care Financial Assistance Program.

Preserve 3-year Transitional Medicaid benefit for Reach Up “leavers”.

Preserve (or restore) categorical Medicaid eligibility for Reach Up families (eliminate new health exchange paperwork).

Fully fund and/or restore funding for Reach Ahead program for 24 months of eligibility.

Food Security

Implement the option to provide federal funded transitional benefits to families leaving Reach Up.

This is a five-month transitional benefit alternative (TBA) that preserves the food stamp amount the family received while on the TANF program. Currently, Vermont provides households leaving Reach Up with a "Reach Ahead" benefit that includes a food benefit funded by the state. The benefit amounts to \$50 per month for 12 months. The TBA is a federal option that, if accepted by the state, will save state dollars and provide families with more money for food during a critical transition to employment and self-sufficiency.

Offer free lunch to all public school students, and provide transportation for summer food programs in rural areas. Recommend a granting program for towns to get additional transportation funds for both food and children.

Create a state/community-matching fund to support schools eligible for the federal Community Eligibility Provision to offer universal school meals. In 2014, all 50 states became eligible to use the new federal Community Eligibility Provision to offer universal school meals in high poverty areas. Most eligible schools in Vermont need to subsidize the meal program in order to provide universal means. The proposed matching fund would provide meals to all students, regardless of income. Hunger Free Vermont estimates that this would require a \$550,000 state appropriation.

Offer free lunch to all public school students, and provide transportation for summer food programs in rural areas. Recommend a grants program for towns to get additional transportation funds for both food and children. ***Encourage the public school lunch program to provide senior centers and child care sites with food year round.*** This would use existing facilities and staff and provide year round full time jobs and good food to kids.

3SquaresVT: Continue to explore under what conditions families could be held harmless for agency errors.

General Assistance

Eliminate "churn" within the General Assistance Program: institute one-time eligibility for GA clients, forecasted eligibility for "cold weather" nights, and eliminate requirement to move once housed. This would reduce paperwork and churn for both employees and beneficiaries by forecasting cold weather nights which would mean multiple nights of housing without reapplication on the coldest winter nights. Currently applicants have to go EVERY DAY to reapply. The average length of benefit is approximately 25 days, so "reapplying" at day 14 is essentially meaningless. Most folks are exhausting the benefit.

GA Diversion. Divert homeless Vermonters from the GA program into affordable housing. Synchronize applications for General Assistance with the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program so that homeless Vermonters with monthly income (Reach Up, disability, etc.) are prioritized and housed immediately.

LIHEAP, Weatherization & Crisis Fuel

Increase investment in Low Income Weatherization Programs. Additional funding is needed to maintain current capacity. The program reduces dependency on Fuel Assistance and reduces the overall cost of home heating. It also provides jobs and energy savings.

Increase State subsidy for LIHEAP Seasonal Fuel Assistance.

Increase Crisis Fuel Assistance for needy families and adequately fund the need for emergency fuel.
(Reverse policy implemented last year.)

Affordable Healthcare, Mental Health and Drug & Alcohol Treatment Programs

Maintain and adequately fund mental health, and drug and alcohol treatment programs.

Keep healthcare affordable for Medicaid, VHAP, and Catamount participants.

Include Dental Benefits and support mid-level Licensed Dental Practitioner position in State.

Accomplishments 2013-2014

12/30/2013 – Council established by Governor Shumlin

3/27/2014 – Council membership completed (30), committees established

5/10/2014 – Examples of Council Endorsed Recommendations Approved:

- Doubling appropriation for Vermont Rental Subsidy
- Increase in Emergency Solutions Grant funding
- Reduction in amount of income homeless must contribute towards Emergency Housing
- Reach Up reforms:
 - Increase in Earned Income Disregard for Reach Up participants
 - Expansion of Reach Ahead
 - Expansion of eligibility for 100% child care subsidy for families attached to Reach Up program (24 months for “leavers”)
- Administrative reduction for SNAP overpayment households
- Reduced SNAP error rates
- Fuel Assistance increase
- Additional staff for AHS/DCF

6/17/2014 – Council retreat

7/17/2014 – Pathways from Poverty Council online information page goes live; request to Governor Shumlin to engage in public participation process re: possible AHS/DCF recommendations; Governor approval for public engagement

8/11/2014 – Online survey for AHS/DCF Recommendations goes live (app. 200 responses)

8/28/2014 – Co-sponsored public hearing on AHS/DCF recommendations

9/5/2014 – Co-sponsored Public hearing on AHS/DCF recommendations

9/29/2014 – Formal recommendations to Governor, AHS Secretary and DCF Commissioner presented w/summary of online public survey

Executive Order No. 09-13

Governor's Council on Pathways From Poverty

WHEREAS, poverty has been a persistent and growing problem in Vermont; and

WHEREAS, poverty affects all communities, including women, children, seniors, disabled Vermonters, working families, immigrants, and the homeless; and

WHEREAS, reducing poverty will greatly benefit the social and economic infrastructure of Vermont; and

WHEREAS, the State of Vermont has a commitment to the quality of life for all of its citizens.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT I, Peter Shumlin, by virtue of the power vested in me as Governor, do hereby establish the Governor's Council on Pathways From Poverty.

I. Composition and Appointments

Members of the Council shall be appointed by the Governor for three-year terms until their successors are appointed. The Governor shall appoint a Chair.

The Council shall include no less than ten and no more than thirty members, including:

- (A) Representatives involved with private agencies and programs that provide services to low-income Vermonters and/or who work to prevent and address poverty in Vermont; and
- (B) A variety of public members with a commitment to fighting poverty, including whenever possible an individual who has qualified for and received state benefits, such as 3SquaresVT, Reach Up, LIHEAP, housing subsidies, or similar support.

II. Council Charge

The Council shall be advisory to the Governor and its responsibilities shall include, but not be limited to:

- A. Determining the nature and primary causes of poverty in Vermont;
- B. Reviewing the extent to which public and private agencies are addressing poverty in Vermont; and
- C. Making recommendations on action that should be taken to respond to poverty in Vermont, including actions taken by:
 - 1. Federal Government,
 - 2. State Government,
 - 3. Local Government,
 - 4. Private non-profit agencies and programs,
 - 5. Charities, and
 - 6. Business and industry.

III. Council Process

The Council shall meet with the Governor three times per year and members may meet more frequently at the call of the Chair. The Council may establish sub-committees and shall meet with and coordinate efforts with other groups, such as the Vermont Council on Homelessness, as necessary.

The Council shall be attached to the Agency of Human Services for administrative support. To the extent funds permit, members shall receive reimbursement of expenses and a per diem pursuant to 12 V.S.A. § 1010(e).

IV. Effective Date

This Order shall take effect upon signing and expire on January 15th, 2017.

Dated December 30th, 2013,

Peter Shumlin
Governor

Members of the Governor's Council on Pathways from Poverty

Co-Chairs:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| Linda Ryan | Samaritan House |
| Christopher Curtis | Vermont Legal Aid |

Members:

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Auburn Watersong | Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence |
| Brenda Brown | Low-Income Advocate |
| Cary Brown | Vermont Commission on Women |
| Eileen Nooney | Vermont Works for Women |
| Elizabeth Ready | John Graham Shelter |
| Erhard Mahnke | Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition |
| Erik Hoekstra | Redstone Commercial Group |
| Harold Nadeau | Disability Rights Advocate |
| Jan Demers | Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity |
| Joe Patrissi | Northeast Kingdom Community Action |
| John Gorczyk | Retired Commissioner of Corrections |
| John Sayles | Vermont Food Bank |
| Joseph Patrissi | Northeast Kingdom Community Action |
| Joshua Davis | Morningside Shelter |
| Karen Lafayette | Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council |
| Lachlan Francis | Student |
| Margaret Lucenti | Consumer Advocate |
| Marissa Parisi | Hunger Free Vermont |
| Mark Redmond | Spectrum Youth Services |
| Martha Allen | Vermont-NEA |
| Melinda Moulton | Main Street Landing |
| Michael Monte | Champlain Housing Trust |
| Patrick Flood | Northern Counties Health Care |
| Richard Williams | Vermont State Housing Authority |
| Rita Markley | Committee on Temporary Shelter |
| Sara Kobylenski | Upper Valley Haven |
| Sheila Reed | Voices for Vermont's Children |
| Whitney Nichols | Consumer Advocate |