

**Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition**  
**Testimony on DCF Emergency Housing BAA Request**  
**House Appropriations Committee**  
January 12, 2016

- Thanks for the opportunity to comment on behalf of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition.
- We strongly support the request for a \$1.6M increase for DCF's Emergency Housing Initiative (Sec. 55 of bill). Together with \$2.3M in the budget passed last spring, that puts them at \$3.9M total, which is consistent with the \$4M average spent the last several years.
- We are not taking a position on the Administration's proposal to take the money from LIHEAP.
- Without this increase, DCF will not be able to fund the alternatives that will help transition us away from a reliance on motel vouchers while at the same time making sure that there is enough funding for housing crises, such as Domestic Violence, catastrophic situations, and crises involving vulnerable families and individuals.
- We all want to move away from motels, but it can't happen overnight. The transition will take a few years.
- We have an affordable housing and homelessness crisis (see additional posted materials:
  - 1% rental housing vacancy rate statewide
  - Housing Wage of \$20.68/hr (\$43K/yr) to pay for a 2 bedroom apartment at \$1,075/mo
  - 75% of renter households <30% of median income (\$20,400/yr) are cost burdened, 61% are severely cost burdened
  - The 2015 Point In Time (PIT) census showed 1,523 Vermonters homeless, a modest decrease from 2014. Of these, 11% were chronically homeless, 31% reported serious mental illness, and 28% had a substance abuse disorder. 19% of households counted had children.
  - Shelter stays averaged almost 37 nights – because there's no place for people to go
- Last summer, DCF began engaging community stakeholders in a process designed to help the State move away from motels. DCF issued an RFP to provide alternatives to motels for crisis housing. This is a first step in the move away from motels.
- DCF received proposals from 11 out of 12 AHS districts - 23 unique proposals
  - Proposals total more than \$600,000
  - 10 awards already in process: Addison, Washington, Chittenden, Windham, Orleans, Windsor & Caledonia
  - 4 seasonal warming shelters (82 beds total): Burlington, Barre, Newport, St. J.
  - 16 additional rooms in year-round, master-leased apartments with services for families with children
  - Innovative partnership with DV partners for victims fleeing domestic violence
  - Additional capacity to serve unaccompanied youth ages 18-24
- In the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of FY 16 DCF spent \$800K on motels, putting them on a trajectory to spend at least \$3.2M. Add \$600K for alternatives and you are just about at the \$3.9M total. If the BAA request is approved, this is NOT an increase over last several years.
- State investments in the VT Rental Subsidy Program, Family Supportive Housing, and Housing Opportunity Grants are beginning to pay off – the PIT showed a modest decrease in homelessness. We need to keep making progress: rejecting DCF's Budget Adjustment increase will take us backwards and leave people freezing out in the cold.