



STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MEMORANDUM

To: House Committee on Appropriations
From: House Committee on Human Services and House Committee on Housing,
General and Military Affairs
Cc: Representative Shap Smith, Speaker, House of Representatives
Date: January 23, 2015
Subject: FY15 Budget adjustment recommendations

As requested, the House Committee on Human Services (Committee) has reviewed provisions of the proposed FY15 budget adjustment pertaining to housing vouchers for individuals with mental illness. The Committee thanks the House Committee on Appropriations for the opportunity to comment on these provisions.

The Committee supports the adjustment appropriating an additional \$611,000 of combined State and federal monies to Pathways for Housing for continued services for the remainder of State FY15.

However, the Committee has serious reservations about the proposal to reduce monies appropriated to the Department of Mental Health for housing vouchers. The Committee believes that the vouchers serve a preventative function by keeping individuals with mental illness stabilized in the community versus escalating to more expensive services, such as inpatient hospital care. During the past year, the Department of Mental Health has found that the mental health voucher program has come in under budget and bases its proposed reduction on the presumption that the program will continue to remain at the same utilization level and that those Vermonters currently housed with vouchers will be housed. The Department has therefore proposed to cap utilization at the current level, meaning that any new applicant would be served only if someone currently housed under a voucher dies, goes to prison or otherwise ceases to use his voucher. The Department did not present testimony that need for additional housing vouchers was nonexistent, nor did it present any estimates pertaining to the projected need for the remainder of this fiscal year. Consequently, the Committee remains unconvinced that this one-time reduction in spending will not show up as an increased need for alternative services in other areas of State government.