



vermont affordable housing coalition

April 13, 2015

Senator Claire Ayer, Chair
Senate Health & Welfare Committee
State House
Montpelier, VT 05602

RE: FY 16 Appropriations Recommendations

Dear Senator Ayer and Committee Members:

Many thanks for the opportunity to testify on the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition's FY 16 budget priorities as they relate to the Agency of Human Services budget last week. As you deliberate over your recommendations to your colleagues down the hall, please consider including the following in your letter:

- Support for **level funding**, as recommended in both the Governor's and the House budgets, for programs administered by the Department for Children and Families and the Office of Economic Opportunity that alleviate and prevent homelessness while reducing the State's reliance on motels for emergency housing, including:
 - **Emergency Solutions Grants**, which provide essential operating expenses for the state's homeless and domestic violence shelters, as well as funding for case management and transitional housing (\$1.1 million);
 - **Vermont Rental Subsidy Program**, which provides rental subsidies for very low-income families with children and individuals with disabilities who are homeless (\$1 million);
 - **Family Supportive Housing Program**, which provides housing and supportive services to homeless families with children (\$600,000);
 - **Community Housing Grants**, which provide a variety of community defined supports to alleviate and prevent homelessness (\$2.9 million); and
- Support for the Governor's recommendation to **level fund** the **Vermont Housing and Conservation Board**, whose investments help alleviate homelessness and avoid costs throughout the human services budget, from health care to Corrections, mental health, nursing homes, and motels. VHCB also funds home accessibility modifications that enable people with disabilities to live more independently. The Governor requested \$16 million, including \$12.15 million from the Property Transfer Tax and \$2.8 million in Capital Funds for each of two years. At a minimum, we ask that you recommend concurrence with the House, which cut a net of \$750,000 from the Governor's request, while shifting an additional \$2 million into the Capital Bill.
- Support for **increased funding**, as recommended in both the Governor's and the House budgets, to:
 - **Pathways Vermont's** Housing First Program, which serves over 200 chronically homeless Vermonters with serious mental health disabilities (\$850,000 in Medicaid Global Commitment funds to replace a federal grant that ended in September 2014).

- **Oppose the Governor's cuts**, approved by the House, to the following:
 - **LIHEAP** (\$6 million cut), which helps low-income and vulnerable Vermonters keep from freezing in their homes during our harsh winters;
 - **Reach Up benefits** (\$1.6 million cut) for families with an adult member who has a disability and receives SSI and, under the proposal by the Governor and House bill, will see the first \$125 in their monthly SSI income count when determining their Reach Up benefit;
 - **Department of Mental Health Housing Vouchers** (\$500,000 cut), which provide Section 8 style rental subsidies for people with mental health disabilities who are extremely low-income and would be homeless without these vouchers and the companion supportive services that help them maintain their housing;
 - **Vermont Legal Aid** (\$47,000 cut), which provides essential legal services for low-income Vermonters; and
 - **AHS Field Services Directors Direct Service and Service Coordination grants** (\$205,000 cut), which are a flexible funding source that helps alleviate crises, including ones related to housing, that would result in far greater cost to the State if left unchecked.
- Request an **increase** for the State's investment in **Weatherization Programs** for low-income and vulnerable Vermonters. At least \$12 million a year is needed to maintain capacity and help meet the State's energy plan goals. The program reduces dependency on LIHEAP and the overall cost of home heating. It also creates jobs and energy savings. The additional funds could be raised by increasing the Gross Receipts Tax from its current level of 0.5% to 1%, with the additional 0.5% to exclude electricity.

Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Many thanks for your consideration,



Erhard Mahnke
Coordinator