

Testimony of Renée Weeks, Director of Shelter and Clinical Services, Upper Valley Haven, White River Junction, February 15, 2018, rweeks@uppervalleyhaven.org; 802-478-1820 direct line, at House Appropriations Committee

I am Renée Weeks, Director of Shelter and Clinical Services at the Upper Valley Haven in White River Junction, working with Sara Kobylenski and the team. I represent our local Continuum of Care at the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness. We thank you for the hard work you do and for the important investments you make in Vermont's citizens. We thank you for the Housing Revenue Bond that will let our partner agency Twin Pines Housing Trust bring 30 more units of desperately needed housing to our community. This bond by itself is not going to fill the housing gap that was quantified last year in the Roadmap to End Homelessness, but it takes an important step forward.

Every day in my job I see the need for all parts of the "three-legged stool" of housing investments: the bricks and mortar, the rental assistance, and the supportive services. Our data at the Haven show the outcomes are best for people who leave our shelters for good quality housing with subsidies for the rent, and close encouragement and available guidance from our service coordination team. I understand that the Administration has asked you to continue your investment in The Family Supportive Housing Program, Housing Opportunity Grants, Vermont Rental Subsidy, DOC Transitional Housing. I encourage you to not only meet their request but to increase the investments to any extent that you can. We know that VHCB is the anchor for the bricks and mortar domain. Full support for their work at the statutory funding level is important to us.

Finally, the biggest struggle we have in our community setting is not opioids, although that is hard. The biggest struggle is people with severe and persistent mental illness who become homeless because they cannot navigate the system. The consequences of the \$500,000 in funds for mental health housing vouchers that was removed from the budget several years ago is playing out on the street now and too often includes expensive and inappropriate use of hospital emergency rooms. Please think about housing for these citizens. Thank you.