

MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Helen Head, Chair
Representative Thomas Stevens, Vice Chair
House Committee on General Housing and Military Affairs

Date: February 27, 2018

From: Angus Chaney, Chair, Vermont Council on Homelessness

Re: H.412, Homeless Bill of Rights

Dear Representatives Head and Stevens,

As someone who works with Vermonters experiencing homelessness, is involved in similar policy work through the Vermont Council on Homelessness, and believes a state should provide equal opportunities to all - regardless of housing status or wealth – I am submitting brief comment on H.412, A Homeless Bill of Rights.

I urge the committee to support balanced provisions in H.412 which would:

- 1. Add housing status as a protected class in Vermont's Fair Housing law;**
- 2. Prevent discrimination in employment;**
- 3. Facilitate access to voting;**
- 4. Facilitate access to obtaining ID; and**
- 5. Ensure confidentiality of personal and protected information.**

I would ask the committee to avoid being led into conflating the *condition* of homelessness with *behaviors* such as panhandling which have received polarizing attention in Vermont's largest towns. The vast majority of the estimated 1,225 Vermonters experiencing homelessness are not camping in public places and are not panhandling or having over-frequent interactions with police. While Vermont has a high percentage of residents experiencing homelessness, it has one of the lowest rates of people considered "unsheltered." (11% of homeless Vermonters were unsheltered in 2017). Most are working to the best of their ability and trying to live as normally as possible in the extremely challenging context of being without a home. This legislation will assist them in their efforts to find and maintain employment, find housing, be secure in their person and move – free of stigma – toward greater stability.

Angus Chaney

Sincerely, Angus Chaney
Chair, Vermont Council on Homelessness