

GOOD SAMARITAN HAVEN

A place where people are served with dignity, compassion, and respect in their time of need.

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Good Samaritan Haven Testimony – H.412 Homeless Bill of Rights

Good Samaritan Haven provides emergency shelter and support services for people experiencing homelessness in Central Vermont. The organization has a 77 bed capacity, and offers basic needs and social services.

Good Samaritan Haven supports H.412 because we see first-hand discrimination against people experiencing homelessness. Recent examples include:

- Unable to check out library books due to lack of permanent address;
- Guests are not allowed to park on the street in front of shelter. Staff and neighbors are allowed to park on the street.
- GMTA has denied discount fare for guests with disabilities because they think they are lying about disability.
- Local municipalities have been reluctant to site Seasonal Warming Shelters. Most recent examples are Rutland and Morrisville; It took three years, and a successful appeal to the Vermont Superior Court, to open Good Samaritan Haven's year-round shelter in the 1980s.

Good Samaritan Haven supports the ACLU's suggested provisions to H.412 including:

- Change "a person without housing" to "actual or perceived to be without housing";
- Adding a private right of action to enforce rights;
- Not enforcing or funding law the prohibit the use of public space by persons without housing;
- Removing sanctions for resting on public property or legally parked cars;
- Protecting personal property of homeless from unreasonable search and seizure; and
- Requiring DMV to relax ID verification requirements if housing status is verified by homeless service provider; Lack of identification is a major barrier to finding stable housing and employment.

Good Samaritan Haven strongly supports H.412 as proposed with the ACLU's proposed amendments. A Homeless Bill of Rights is timely given that homelessness is on the rise in Vermont – and discrimination against people experiencing homelessness is real. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill.