

FY 19 Budget Testimony to Senate Appropriations Committee, April 4, 2018

Sara L. Kobylenski, Executive Director, Upper Valley Haven
Steering Committee, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition; and Member, Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the budget; thank you for the careful consideration you give to these complex challenges.

In all our work on the Roadmap to End Homelessness and in the Housing Consolidated Plan we have documented thoughtful and practical ways to move forward. We know how to do this right. It all gets back to

1. Bricks and mortar dollars to create more affordable housing
2. State rental and other housing related financial assistance to fill the affordability gap, and
3. Supportive services to help those with the greatest barriers to accessing and maintaining housing.

I have stepped away from the intensity of the faces and stories of so many struggling Vermonters to convey as best I can that a safe place to live still underpins everything else in our lives. The Partnership with VHCBC to create the housing bond for \$37 million is a huge step forward but it is not going to solve all the problems. For us it means that our partner Twins Pines Housing Trust can bring on line one more set of apartments, which means a few people who are stuck in our shelters due to lack of affordable, available housing will have a new resource in the months ahead.

This morning our AHS Field Services Director called asking us to help her with a 59-year-old woman who has both physical and mental health challenges, and a monthly income of \$750. She is being evicted as her very tolerant landlord can no longer accept her \$500 per month payments on the \$800 per month everything included rent. There must be a way that people like her can have housing.

The tools to solve problems like this that make the most difference for us every day are:

Bricks and Mortar: the programs and projects funded through the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

Rental & Housing Related Financial Assistance, and Supportive Services:

- Vermont Rental Subsidy Program
- DMH Shelter Plus Care Program
- Corrections Supportive Services
- Housing Opportunity Program
- Family Supportive Housing
- Housing First
- Support and Services at Home (SASH)
- Assistive Community Care Services

Retaining and where possible expanding funding in these programs changes lives and strengthens our communities. It saves costs from the negative consequences that happen inevitably in the absence of opportunities.

Yesterday a family came in to get help from one of our Service Coordinators in filling out an application for Habitat for Humanity. They had been homeless with five children three years ago. Since then they have benefitted from a HOP service, a Vermont Rental Subsidy, the Family Supportive Housing program and housing in a building owned by Twin Pines Housing Trust. Both parents are also working, the dad full time and the mom part time, to avoid higher child care costs. They applied to Habitat a year ago and were turned down as they did not yet have good enough credit or a long enough track record of success. They have reached the new milestone defined by Habitat and are trying again. I know they will succeed, but without the programs you have kept in the state budget, this would never be happening.

Thank you!