

TESTIMONY BY MARK REDMOND

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, SPECTRUM YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

January 31, 2020

RE: H. 492 - An act relating to establishing a homeless bill of rights and prohibiting discrimination against people without homes

Thank you for inviting me here to speak to you about H. 492. I am the executive director of Spectrum Youth and Family Services, a nonprofit organization based in Burlington which serves homeless and at-risk youth in both Chittenden and Franklin Counties. The youth with whom we work range in age from 13 all the way up to 24 and they include youth who are literally homeless, youth suffering from substance use disorder, those with a mental health diagnosis, juvenile justice background, high school dropouts, youth involved in human trafficking, and often a combination of any if not all of these.

I believe Spectrum is the largest provider of services to homeless youth in the State. We operate a 10-bed Warming Shelter during the winter, from November 1 through to March 31st. We also have a year-round 8-bed shelter which we call The Landing. It opens at 5pm each day and closes at 8am. In the same building we have an 8-bed Transitional Living Residence, where youth are able to live for up to three years, during which time they pay rent, open a bank account, continue with their education, secure employment and learn independent living skills such as driving a car, what a lease is, what credit card debt is, etc.

We offer all kinds of support services to homeless youth. On the first floor of that same building is a drop-in center where youth can receive a free hot lunch and dinner, obtain clothing, take a shower and do their laundry. Adjacent to that is the free health clinic run by the Burlington Community Health Center. We also have on staff our own counselors who are licensed in both mental health and substance abuse treatment. We have job developers on staff who link youth to employers, and we even started our own L3C corporation three years ago, Detail Works, to hire our youth and teach them work skills.

I testified on this bill at this committee two years ago, I know the bill has changed somewhat since then but in my view it looks very much the same. And my view on it is the same. To me it provides basic rights that are due to every American

citizen and there is nothing in here that I view as radical or outlandish. I've seen a Homeless Bill of Rights in other states that go far beyond this bill in terms of what the state is obligated to provide should someone declare themselves homeless. This bill in my opinion does not do that.

I remember two years ago at least one person who testified against the bill, claiming it will prohibit the police from doing their job when a homeless person behaves inappropriately or violently. I disagree with that position. I do not think this bill excuses poor behavior by someone who may be homeless, and I don't think it will prohibit the police from performing their duties when necessary.

I do hope that this time this committee votes in favor of H.492 and that it moves to the floor of the House for a vote.

Thank you and please let me know if you have any questions.