

Sec. E.321 TRANSITION TO COMMUNITY BASED ALTERNATIVES FOR
GENERAL ASSISTANCE TEMPORARY HOUSING

(a) Funds appropriated to the Agency of Human Services in the General Assistance program in fiscal year 2021 may be used for temporary housing in catastrophic situations and for vulnerable populations, as defined in rules adopted by the Agency. The Commissioner for Children and Families may, by policy, provide temporary housing for a limited duration in adverse weather conditions when appropriate shelter space is not available. [this is existing session language from prior fiscal years]

(b) The Commissioner shall continue supporting regional planning processes ~~with community-based agencies~~ in preparation for implementing a statewide, community-based emergency housing system effective April 1, 2021. Operation of the General Assistance motel voucher program under current rules shall continue July 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021. Effective April 1, 2021 current General Assistance emergency housing rules are repealed. ~~Prior to April 1, 2021, the Commissioner shall put in place program policies, standards and procedures to ensure program oversight and monitoring, consistency and equity in program administration and distribution of assistance, a grievance process, and a commitment to seek sufficient state funding to meet the emergency housing needs of homeless and vulnerable Vermonters statewide. The Commissioner, in collaboration with the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness, the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, and the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition, shall provide a report~~ ~~The Commissioner shall provide an update~~ detailing the progress towards implementation to the House Committees on Appropriations; General, Housing, & Military Affairs; and Human Services; and the Senate Committees on Appropriations;

Economic Development, Housing, & General Affairs; and Health and Welfare by December 15, 2020.

(c) The Commissioner shall convene a working group to include members appointed by the Speaker from the House Committees on Appropriations, General Housing & Military Affairs, and Human services; members appointed by the President Pro Tempore from the Senate committees on Appropriations, Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs, and Health and Welfare; and representatives of the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness, the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, and the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition. The working group shall begin to meet no later than September 30, 2020 to facilitate timely planning, collaboration, and progress updates in advance of the December 15, 2020 report from the Commissioner and community stakeholders about the transition to a statewide, community-based emergency housing system.

Sec. E.321.1 HOUSING ASSISTANCE BENEFITS; FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM

(a) For fiscal year 2021, the Agency of Human Services may continue to fund housing assistance programs within the General Assistance program to create flexibility to provide General Assistance benefits, as well as grants to support the establishment of community-based alternatives for temporary housing as part of the effort to reduce the number of individuals temporarily housed by the General Assistance program. The purpose of these housing assistance programs and community-based alternatives is to mitigate poverty and serve applicants more effectively than they are currently being served with General Assistance funds. Eligible activities shall include, among other things, the provision of shelter, overflow shelter, case management, transitional housing, deposits, down payments, rental assistance, upstream prevention, and related services that

ensure that all Vermonters have access to shelter, housing, and the services they need to become safely housed. The Agency may award grants to homeless and housing service providers for eligible activities. Where such housing assistance programs and grants are provided, and community-based programs are established, the General Assistance rules shall not apply. The assistance provided under this section is not an entitlement and may be discontinued when the appropriation has been fully spent.

(b) The housing assistance and community-based programs may operate in up to 12 districts designated by the Secretary of Human Services. The Agency shall establish goals and procedures for evaluating the program overall, including performance measures that demonstrate program results, and for each district in which the Agency operates the program, it shall establish procedures for evaluating the district program and its effects.

(c) The Agency shall continue to engage interested parties, including both statewide organizations and local agencies, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of housing assistance programs and community-based alternatives to General Assistance temporary housing.

The previous year's Budget Bill language in E.321.1(a)(b)(c) as passed would also need to remain in the budget – Please see section E.321.1 above