

MEMO

To: Members of the Senate Appropriations and House Appropriations Committees
From: Chris Donnelly, Champlain Housing Trust on behalf of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition
Da: August 28, 2020
Re: Appropriation for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

Thank you for taking the time to hear from me. On behalf of the 50 members of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition, I wanted to offer my deepest gratitude to the members of both committees for their commitment to work carried out in communities across the state with the dollars allocated to VHCB. The land conserved, housing built, and special places in and outside of our communities are lasting assets for generations of Vermonters.

I encourage you to support VHCB's budget appropriation of \$10.5M which has been supplemented through the capital bill. The budget appropriation represents a 3% cut. I also request, that to the extent that one-time dollars are available, that you restore the grant writing program with at least a \$75,000 allocation to keep that beneficial and very successful capacity program for small communities across the state and leveraging millions of dollars.

I wanted to touch briefly on your dedication of the Coronavirus Relief Funds in response to the public health emergency, specifically your housing allocations. In partnership with community groups across the State, VHCB has already made over \$30 million in grants to respond to the needs of shelters to become operational in our new COVID-19 world, and more transformational, to create housing opportunity to move people out of homelessness. This one-time infusion, as you know, had to happen fast, and it has. I've talked to people across the country that are astounded by the path we chose, collaboration in place, and pace that the State has done this work. Thank you.

As we come out of this crisis, I want you to leave you with three thoughts:

1. The economic situation for working class and low-income people is likely going to be worse, and the economic recovery for those households will take longer and be harder. The need for affordable housing will grow even beyond the very challenging market conditions we had pre-COVID-19.
2. The housing market is going to heat up as people flee urban areas south of here, and as more companies realize their workforce can work remotely. We're seeing this already in southern parts of the State. That has the possibility to price working Vermonters out of the market.
3. VHCB will be one of the best tools you have for economic recovery. Whether it is an investment in conserving land or building housing, these are long term assets we create that put people to work and strengthen our communities. We have projects ready to go as soon as resources are available.

Again, thank you for your commitment to VHCB and I encourage you to support the Governor's recommendation, with the addition of one-time funding for the grant writing support that's been so successful.