

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today. And thank you too for the support that you have provided for efforts aimed at increasing housing units, and supporting homeless shelters throughout the state. I'm Josh Davis, Executive Director of Groundworks Collaborative in Brattleboro. I am also the co-chair of the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness.

Groundworks provides ongoing support to families and individuals facing housing and food insecurities. We operate the largest food shelf in southeastern Vermont, as well as 3 shelters:

1. Groundworks Shelter—a 30-bed year-round shelter that supports families and individuals with intensive case management services.
2. Seasonal Overflow Shelter—Brattleboro's 33-bed winter warming shelter.
3. Day Shelter—a safe place where our neighbors experiencing homelessness can come in out of the weather during the day and access services and case management.

I'd like to highlight a couple recent initiatives that illustrate the positive impact of investments in housing, subsidies and services.

The first is Great River Terrace. Great River Terrace is an innovative permanent supportive housing program that converted a run down motel into 22 micro apartment units dedicated to chronically homeless individuals.

Windham & Windsor Housing Trust is the developer and they were able to utilize the Housing Bond to make this vision a reality. Groundworks and HCRS provide the vital services on site to support people. We are over six months into the first year of Great River Terrace and we are starting to hit our desired outcomes for the project. Currently everyone who leased up is still housed and 85% of residents are engaged in voluntary case management services. This project success is due in large part to combining dignified housing, with a subsidy to keep rents extremely affordable and providing services on site.

The next innovation to report is that last season our 33-bed winter warming shelter changed from a model that relied on volunteers to one that utilizes paid staff. The size of the shelter and the intensity of the program made it extremely difficult to operate on a shoestring budget utilizing only volunteers. The shelter has utilized GA Community Investment funds, to support this vital program change. The impact can be seen in different ways—year-to-date data (July-Dec) compared over the past three fiscal years shows a significant decrease in the numbers of unduplicated households accessing emergency motels as well as unduplicated nights of emergency housing in the Brattleboro service area. Although there may be other contributing factors to this, Brattleboro does have multiple GA Community Investments as well as an established Coordinated Entry system.

As we are seeing progress in terms of emergency housing usage, this year has been our most challenging operating the program. We have had 4 overdoses in our shelter since we opened on November 12th. We've gone from having a mixed population, to rapidly increasing rates of

substance use, and overdoses involving fentanyl. Because we have competent staff and policies and procedures in place, no one has died.

Windham County is embroiled in the opioid crisis. While the 2017 and 2018 numbers are not yet final, the Vital Statistics data available to date show that Windham County overdose deaths jumped from 13 to 21 over the period.

Housing is the lynchpin for stability. Investments in housing, subsidies and services for Vermont's most vulnerable are working. The two examples I mentioned are evidence of the impact of investment and at the same time we're seeing more intense challenges and need continued, additional investments.

Thank you.