

To the Vermont House and Senate Committees on Appropriations:

A Testimony in Support of VHCB Funding

My name is Tess Milner and I would like to share with you about how having access to affordable housing has greatly impacted my life, and that of many others.

Two years ago, I made the life altering decision to leave an unhealthy marriage, which means I became a single mother to my five-year-old and three-year-old daughters.

I had been out of the workforce as a stay at home mother for several years and had recently moved to Vermont from out of state. I had no friends or family to help support me during what was a very challenging time.

Thankfully I was able to obtain employment fairly quickly, and so the time came for me to find a place to live for myself and two daughters. Looking through the local ads, I quickly realized that the cost of housing in our area was very high. There was no way that I could afford an appropriately sized apartment at the current market rates.

I was working with a local organization that was helping me through my divorce and was given information so that I could apply for affordable housing. There were a few options in my area, such as properties developed by the Vermont State Housing Authority, Lamoille Housing Partnership, and other, smaller landlords with rental units. There were long waitlists with most of them, but thankfully there was a unit available that I was approved for at one of the Lamoille Housing Partnership developed sites.

I cannot put into words how thankful I am to have found clean, decent, affordable housing.

My girls and I have a place to call home, where they have room to run and play, feel safe, and not have to worry about where they are going to sleep at night.

Without this resource, I would have had no other option in obtaining a place to live. Affordable housing has helped me to build a vital foundation on a new life, stability for myself and my children, and I wouldn't be who I am today without it.

I currently work three jobs, averaging about 75 hours per week. I do this, not only because I have two young children and need to work around their school schedule, but because it is a necessity of life due to the cost of housing.

And I am not alone in this struggle.

One of my jobs is as an advocate at one of the local domestic and sexual violence organizations. Through my advocacy work I have seen many individuals and families struggle to obtain affordable housing, the main reason being the lack thereof. Throughout the year there are long waitlists. The need for affordable housing continues to grow because of reasons such as Vermont's aging population and the increasing gap between the cost of living to wage ratio. There are individuals and families who are in desperate need of housing and have literally resorted to camping out in the woods with their children due to the shortage of affordable housing.

Everyone deserves access to safe, clean, and decent affordable housing, and I have it, because legislators like you have funded the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. But there are too many that don't.

When individuals and families have access to affordable housing, they are able to put more money towards the purchasing of goods and services. They have a greater opportunity to further their careers and education for themselves and their children.

The solution to the growing problem is to increase support and funding of affordable housing.

By supporting the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, you are supporting the development of affordable housing for people like me, and many other individuals and families, which benefits our entire economy.

I ask that you please support the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board with a \$22.4 million appropriation this year to address the real housing needs in our communities across the state.