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Thank you for the opportunity to speak to the urgent concern of how to keep our most vulnerable community members safe during this unprecedented health crisis. The Windham & Windsor Housing Trust is a 32-year-old non-profit that provides homes to over 1,500 adults and children in 818 apartments scattered throughout the two counties. We also have a long history of providing permanent homes to those who have experienced homelessness. Currently, 178 or 22% of the households living in one of our apartments was either homeless prior to moving in or were on the precipice of homelessness. Many of these residents are receiving ongoing support from one of the ten community partners with whom we have a Memorandums of Understanding to provide case management and housing retention services. Today, 236 households in our portfolio are supported in this manner including 110 individuals supported by two SASH panels embedded within our housing sites.

Two years ago, we developed our region's first permanent supportive housing community called Great River Terrace. Great River Terrace is home to 22 households and most of them have experienced chronic and persistent homelessness due to substance use disorder and/or ongoing mental and physical health challenges. Supportive services are provided onsite by two community partners. Groundworks Collaborative helps residents navigate the challenges of learning new patterns of behavior that includes planning ahead and accessing resources that will address some of the underlying conditions of homelessness. Healthcare & Rehabilitation Services provides clinical support for more complex mental health challenges.

Our experience of partnering with community organizations to provide support services in both a scattered site model or in a concentrated setting like Great River Terrace has taught us how critical these services are to helping people who have experienced homelessness gain stability and rebuild their lives. We have consistently found that residents with supportive services are more likely to maintain their housing and weather the variety of challenges that come their way. And the SASH model has taught us that targeted support results in better health outcomes like controlled hypertension and an increase of participants being vaccinated for seasonal flu and pneumonia. These positive outcomes are why any proposal aimed at protecting the most vulnerable Vermonters during this long term health crisis needs to include additional resources for supportive services.

As you know, over 1,700 homeless Vermonters are currently living in motels or hotels in order to give them the opportunity stay home/stay safe. In Brattleboro, this number is 117 and for the Springfield District the number is 79. This is quite remarkable. As my colleague Josh Davis Groundworks wrote in an op-ed piece this morning, we've actually solved the problem of homelessness in Brattleboro in the last 30 days. We don't know of a single person sleeping outside in Brattleboro right now. Of course, this current solution is not sustainable, but as Josh goes on to say, COVID19 has shown us how taking care of each of us is the best way to take care of all of us and that our entire community's vulnerability is directly connected to the vulnerability of any of its parts.

We need a plan. With a persistent low vacancy rate throughout the state, this is going to mean a significant long term investment in new housing construction and an infusion of funding for shorter term

solutions right now. We simply don't have the inventory to absorb every homeless person who will may need to leave their current situation later this spring. For example, the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust only has 5 vacancies at the moment which is less than 5% of those living in a hotel right now. In Burlington, Champlain Housing Trust reports that they only have 10 apartments available for homeless folks which is less than 1% of the 400 people living in hotel rooms right now.

While these numbers are daunting, Vermont is in the fortunate position of having a solid network of strong and experienced housing development organizations that can mobilize their expertise and capacity to tackle this issue. We demonstrated this just recently with the rapid deployment of Housing Revenue Bond funds to create hundreds of new housing units in just a few years. This includes 68 new homes produced by the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust in the last 2 years and another 26 slated for construction this fall. I know every Executive Director of an organization like mine is strategizing right now with our respective community partners to identify possible properties to acquire or sites to develop in order to ensure that every Vermonter has a home in which to seek refuge from the threat of this deadly virus and that they have the supportive services needed to remain stable.

In the short run, we need resources to maintain the current situation that is keeping people safely sheltered while we develop longer term solutions. This means continued funding for organizations like Groundworks Collaborative who are providing 3 meals a day and consistent support to individuals and families living in hotels. We also need additional rental assistance funding to sustain the current situation and so that as existing and new apartments become available, we have the resources to help people transition into these permanent homes. And it's critical that additional development capital be part of this strategy so that organizations like Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, Champlain Housing Trust and other housing developers can begin tackling the inventory issue and bring more housing units online. This is the three legged stool metaphor that "housers" consistently use and it couldn't be more compelling than right now.

I know that there is an enormous amount of funding coming into the state through the Cares Act and that there are hundreds of details to work out in order to determine how to spend these funds. I don't envy those of you who are tasked with this responsibility. I do thank you though – for everything you are doing to help us emerge from this crisis a stronger community. A permanent home for everyone is a key component to ensuring this happens. COVID has made it impossible to deny the importance of home as the very foundation of health and safety. May we transform this heightened awareness into action and use this moment to strengthen our housing delivery system by building more homes, expanding supportive services and increasing rental assistance. Thank you.