

Rebuilding a Safer and Healthier Emergency to Permanent Affordable Housing System

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COVID-19 made evident the fragility of the state's emergency housing system and underlying need for affordable housing. Through extraordinary leadership and partnerships, AHS, in a matter of weeks, secured housing for and meals for Vermont's homeless individuals and families. This demonstrates that with intent and resources, it is possible to provide safe, decent and affordable housing for all. The crisis comes on the heels of a proposed restructuring of state support for the homeless shelters and providers. The system was inadequate and underfunded even before the virus arrived. While AHS is now necessarily focused on the immediate response to the pandemic and keeping people alive and safe, this is a temporary solution. We must redesign the system for the future while sustaining the residents as well as owners, managers and service providers all of whom have been strained by the economic fallout of the pandemic.

Proposal:

The House Committee on Housing, General and Military Affairs and the Senate Economic, Housing and General Affairs direct the creation of a Housing for the Future Task Force to redesign the state's emergency to permanent affordable housing system. The task force would comprise VHCB, VHFA, DHCD, the Vermont State Housing Authority, and the Office of Economic Opportunity and work in consultation with the State Treasurer, housing, shelter and service providers and other stakeholders. It shall assess how state and new federal resources can be put to work creating a better system protecting Vermonters health and promoting the state's economic recovery. This ad hoc task force shall develop funding and implementation plans to more safely house vulnerable Vermonters creating a path to permanent housing. It will include creating emergency and transitional housing facilities statewide sufficient to safely house the existing and an expanded number of people experiencing homelessness. This work will be based on existing state housing needs assessments, data on homelessness, and plans including the Roadmap to Ending Homelessness.

1. Transition homeless individuals and families from motels and shelters to permanent housing with rental assistance and services.
2. Enhance eviction prevention resources in anticipation of lifting of eviction moratoriums and economic homelessness.
3. Develop and rehabilitate permanently affordable housing.
4. Create permanent supportive housing sites in areas of high need.
5. Stand up alternatives to crowded emergency shelter and overflow facilities.
6. Expand housing first services statewide to help homeless individuals with high needs to find affordable apartments and remain stably housed.
7. Develop programs to assist tenants and landlords in squaring up rent delinquencies for non-profit and private rental properties and mobile home parks to ensure ongoing financial viability

and protect tenants credit worthiness. Also grants to bring rental properties up to health, safety, and energy building codes.

8. Set up a statewide rental housing registry and health code enforcement capacity.
9. Provide project development assistance and capital funding for health and safety repairs to mobile home parks.

Allocate a minimum of \$106 M of the Coronavirus Relief Fund for the implementation for near and mid-term actions. (Note: Total needed not yet established. Assessment by affordable housing non-profits indicates \$106.5 million to cover a portion of the needs of 1700 households now in motels.)

- I. Expand rental assistance to permanently house families and individuals in temporary housing or motels.
- II. Assess existing and new federal funding for housing to determine what is eligible for each and how to maximize the different programs;
- III. Secure state funding for housing to fill gaps created by federal regulations and the general rule that federal funding is to be used for expenses directly related to COVID-19 and not for improvements or expansions.
- IV. Examine existing state resources, such as affordable housing tax credits, for statutory changes to flexibility required by the COVID response and recovery.
- V. Determine what housing needs that existed prior to the crisis that could be eligible for \$s from the Coronavirus Relief Fund or supplemental allocations to categorical grants such as CDBG, ESG or other sources. These include health and safety repairs at mobile home parks and helping private owners bring their rental properties up to code.
- VI. Work with congressional delegation on upcoming stimulus and recovery bills to address unmet needs, secure necessary statutory and regulatory flexibility and enhance the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, HOME and other federal housing resources.

The Task Force shall report back to the committees on a bi-weekly basis on progress and to make recommendations for funding or statutory adjustments.