

I am here to ADVOCATE for Vermonters esp. low-moderate income who are paying high heating/cooling/electric bills.

I am here to ADVOCATE for Vermonters who live in houses or apartments that are making them sick.

I am here to ADVOCATE for Vermonters who do not know who to call, where to start, who to trust to fix up their homes.

NeighborWorks/HEAT Squad can HELP, every step of the way.

NeighborWorks/HEAT Squad is supporting the Climate Action Agenda and hopes that the committee will support it as well. The Governor's Climate Action Commission has recommended doubling the number of homes that are weatherized in Vermont each year, want to make sure that middle-income families are included in that goal, and HEAT Squad is one program that will help, if we can scale up. When we reach full statewide scale, annually we could complete 3000 audits and help 1200 families to complete weatherization/home maintenance projects that would lower energy costs (ave. \$1.1M annually), reduce greenhouse gas emissions (ave. 6M lbs of carbon saved annually), improve our housing stock, generate revenue for local contractors (ave. \$9.6M annually), and make families healthier and more comfortable in their homes.

We ask that Senate Natural Resources & Energy include in your budget memo our request to appropriate \$1.25M in one-time funding either all at once or spread over 5 years for the statewide expansion of HEAT Squad so Vermonters can be served in every county and to reach an economy of scale that is self-sustaining.

HEAT Squad is available for all incomes in Addison, Rutland, Bennington, Windham, Windsor, Orleans, Essex and Caledonia Counties. The demographic that is most in need of our service and mainly uses our services are families that are 80% to 120% of Area Median Income – middle income Vermonters who do not qualify for free Weatherization services, but do not have the resources to finance retrofits to their homes to make them WARM, SAFE, DRY, and HEALTHY.

HEAT Squad started in Rutland County in 2010 with grant from DOE, lowering barriers (how to pay for the work, how to prioritize, how to work with contractors) and providing OBJECTIVE customer service through the process while focusing on workforce development. We quickly expanded to an additional four southern counties, with the help of a Northern Borders Regional Commission grant we have grown into the NEK. We start with a comprehensive low-cost energy audit (\$150), delivering the report at the audit. We are assessing energy issues, as well as health/safety issues and home repairs. We sit down with the family to go over the recommendations, discussing their priorities and next steps. When the family wants to move forward, we work with them through the entire process from discussing in-house finance options that can include low-interest loans that aim to get the monthly payment lower than the family is currently paying for their energy bills. We help them chose a contractor and coordinate between the family and the contractor. We check the work at the end of the project and resolve any issues that need to be addressed, performing 100% project quality review, submitting paperwork to get any rebates available. We have collaborated with various local or statewide partners such as our local hospital to add other options and resources.

NeighborWorks of Western Vermont is a non-profit organization. HEAT Squad is essentially a social enterprise model, receiving some fees for HEAT Squad services, and we never have been a for-profit business. We intentionally chose to subsidize our HEAT Squad services with other funds from our non-profit, but it has been running in a deficit because it requires an economy of scale to become self-sufficient financially. Many of the costs of expanding the program are “up-front” costs, we must do outreach and education, invest time and ENERGY into working with contractors, develop relationships with community partners, and hire additional auditors. The program becomes self-sustaining when we can complete enough audits and have enough families complete projects that the fees associated with various parts pay for the program itself. We know that the gap in funding is \$250,000/year, and it would take approximately 5 years to reach the economy of scale we need to be self-sustaining and serve the whole state.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. Please contact us if you have any questions or would like more information about HEAT Squad.