

Michael Redmond  
Executive Director  
Upper Valley Haven  
White River Junction, VT

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To the members of the Senate Appropriations Committee, I bring greetings and appreciation from the directors, staff, clients and guests of the Upper Valley Haven. My name is Michael Redmond. I am the Executive Director of the Haven. For 38 years the Haven has provided essential sources of support of transitional shelter, emergency shelter, food, and community supportive services to the most vulnerable people of the Upper Valley and surrounding communities. I very much appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of the goals of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition to increase funding for proven programs that provide supportive services to the homeless, seniors and people with disabilities.

The Haven's doors are open every day to meet the needs of people without homes or places to sleep. While the Haven's programs are largely privately funded, grants from Vermont provide some key support to complement these funds. In the last full year of the **Housing Opportunity Grant Program**, we provided over 16,000 shelter bednights in our transitional shelters for nearly 200 families and adults. Of the 81 families and adults who exited our transitional shelters during the year, over 50% were able to transition to stable and permanent housing.

The **Family Supportive Housing Program** we operate provides essential services of care management for people living in the community. At the end of the most recent quarter, 86% of 21 program families were stably housed and only 1 was homeless.

Every day in my job I see the need for all parts of the "three-legged stool" of housing investments: the bricks and mortar, the rental assistance, and the supportive services. Our data at the Haven show the outcomes are best for people who leave our shelters for good quality housing with subsidies for the rent, and close encouragement and available guidance from our service coordination team.

These programs, plus others the Haven operates, achieve the goals of helping people remain stably housed with reduced demands for public services. Increases in funding for supportive services will help more families to be stably housed for longer periods. Vermont has not been able to fully utilize available vouchers for rent support from the federal government because some local agencies are unable to provide the required match for case management which would be possible if funding for supportive services of case management was increased.

For example, in the HUD Continuum of Care Rapid Rehousing Program there were \$312 thousand not utilized last year. These funds would have been able to serve an additional 39 households with 12 months of rental assistance assuming an average \$650 per month rental assistance. Based upon the current rate of unspent funds for the past six months of the existing grant, VSHA projects that the state will return approximately \$475,000 to HUD of unexpended funds which would have served another 61 households for 12 months.

Similarly, in the HUD Continuum of Care Permanent Supportive Housing Program (Shelter + Care) over the past five years over \$1 million was “recaptured” which would have served 128 households for 12 months. And this amount of recaptured funds is growing. Last year alone, over \$336 thousand was recaptured meaning that about 43 households with 12 months of rental assistance were left unserved.

But the meaning of work we do cannot be fully appreciated through a recitation of numbers served, dollars spent or resources needed. Tonight is the last night our winter seasonal shelter is open to serve our community this year. Most nights we have had 15 adults, 10 or 11 men, 4 or 5 women, stay with us for a warm safe space, a good meal, a hot shower and companionship that tells them they are not forgotten. Tomorrow morning, we will say farewell to Brian, James, Michelle, JP, Catherine and the others. Many will return to the woods to a life apart from society. We supply a lot of tents, sleeping bags and camping equipment at this time of year. Some have vague plans to stay with a friend or see if someone will take them in, that there’s a bridge that hasn’t been completely burned. Others have no specific plans. They tell us, I’ll be fine. We certainly hope so.

We’re very pleased that one of our guests who will be with us on this final night has a Shelter Plus Care voucher for transitional housing and two more are close to having this resource available to them. And during the winter three of our seasonal shelter guests were able to transition into our Hixon Adult Shelter where they are safe and are able to plan with us for a more secure future. We wish there were more stories that included this hopeful transitional point. We don’t say ending, because from experience we know it takes a while for many of their crooked paths to be made straight.

We urge the Appropriations Committee to remember our guests and visitors when you undertake the hard decisions you must make as you set priorities for the state. Thank you again for your service and your support of these essential programs. We recognize that the appropriations task is challenging due to the many demands for a limited pool of dollars. We support the investments in these programs because they do make a difference in people’s lives. It is through the partnership of the Haven and other social service agencies with the State of Vermont that these programs offer a long-term solution that is sustainable over time.