



April 29, 2020

House Speaker Mitzi Johnson
Senate President Pro Tem Tim Ashe
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Speaker Johnson and President Pro Tem Ashe:

I want to start by thanking you for your leadership during this crisis. My heart has swelled with pride to be a Vermonter in recent days. Our state's actions have saved countless lives.

Throughout this legislative session representatives of Pathways Vermont have been meeting with legislators and committees to discuss how we can help end homelessness in the state. We have spoken about our innovative housing services and the essential and cost-effective work Pathways Vermont does to transform lives and provide the basic human right of housing.

Of course, the world has turned upside down since our initial conversations.

Despite the pandemic, in the last six weeks, Pathways Vermont has permanently housed 30 people in communities around the state working with local landlords. The people we are serving, as you may remember, are people with the greatest barriers to accessing housing in the state.

Pathways Vermont can do more to permanently house and serve the 1,600 individuals currently in motels and shelters around the state. We want to help. We are an underutilized resource that is a proven way to address the housing crisis and provide savings to the state.

This crisis can be an opportunity to invest in a 'scattered-site', Housing First service model for the state. With a \$2.5 million investment in Pathways Vermont, we can expand our services to cover the state, including the counties we are not currently serving: Rutland, Bennington, Lamoille, Orange, Caledonia, and Essex. We can also increase our capacity in the counties where we have established teams. We estimate that an additional \$1 million in rental subsidies would be needed to maintain housing for that new population. With this investment from federal COVID-19 funds, we could support 200 additional Vermont families at a time, and as those 200 graduate out of our program, we could take on more.

Pathways Vermont's Housing First Program places families into permanent, pre-existing housing in the community and is markedly less expensive and quicker than new construction. It also supports local landlords and helps people integrate into the community, not segregate them, which helps to further ostracize and alienate our society's most vulnerable populations.

Using a portion of the federal funding that is being made available to the state to address the housing crisis that will occur when people need to leave motels is both a prudent and compassionate way to end the experience of homelessness for hundreds of Vermonters. We know that physical distancing will be with us for some time into the future. We simply cannot afford to have people return to the shelters, cars, and encampments where they lived before the pandemic.

Continuing the investment in Pathways Vermont's statewide Housing First Services once the pandemic is behind us will require your support. One thing has become very clear over the last six weeks, housing is healthcare! Helping our most vulnerable helps us all.

Certainly, no one has a crystal ball and can tell what the next few years will bring, but we know for sure that permanent housing, utilizing pre-existing housing stock and the support services to ensure participant success will always be essential if we truly want to end the crisis of homelessness.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership.

Sincerely,



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cc Sen. Becca Balint
Rep. Jill Krowinski
Sen. Jane Kitchel
Rep. Kitty Toll
Sen. Michael Sirotkin
Rep. Tom Stevens
Sen. Ginny Lyons
Rep. Ann Pugh
Rep. Bill Lippert
Sen. Dick Sears
Rep. Alice Emmons