

Testimony to Joint Appropriations Committee on FY 22 Budget 2.8.21

Good evening, my name is Molly Dugan and I am the Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives for Cathedral Square and one of the co-chairs of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition (VHCC). VHCC is a coalition of more than 50 private businesses and nonprofit organizations that represent a wide spectrum of interests from statewide developers of affordable housing to small, community-based land trusts.

VHCC respectfully requests your support of the Governor's \$34.8M FY22 Budget Recommend for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. This proposed increase is appropriate given the scale of the need before us and the proven record of accomplishment of VHCC members to deliver solutions to the urgent community needs brought on by Covid. These needs include homelessness, affordable housing, access to the outdoors for physical and mental health, and economic recovery.

My fellow Co-Chair Phil Huffman from the Nature Conservancy testified earlier today focusing on the conservation side of VHCC's mission so my remarks will focus on the housing side. We have seen a rapid rise in the real estate market due to Covid and this has a direct impact on the availability of land and high quality affordable housing for low and moderate income Vermonters.

You can count on our members to use the proposed budget increase effectively, equitably and efficiently. We have shown, through the years and most recently with the capital funds provided through the Housing Revenue Bond and Coronavirus Relief Funds, that by partnering with state agencies, local community provider organizations, and most importantly the people we serve we can create and repair high quality housing that also revitalizes communities.

Your investment to the recommended level will facilitate:

- **DIVERSE PROJECTS ACROSS the STATE.** This is the ideal time to take fuller advantage of the statewide network of housing and conservation organizations to both respond to immediate needs of Vermonters and to invest in our economy, landscape, and community infrastructure that will deliver benefits for years to come.
- **JOB GROWTH and ECONOMIC RECOVERY.** New and revitalized housing developments create jobs. High quality and varied housing options attract and retain employers and their employees.
- **HEALTH EQUITY.** The positive impact of high quality and affordable housing on health is well documented in research. VHCC members are committed to creating housing communities that increase residents' access to social services, wellness programs and health care. Our members have invested to improve access to broadband making telehealth and social connections more viable in all corners of the state.

Lastly, the needed investments are varied across the state and we urge you to encourage flexibility for VHCB to direct funds as needed to respond to individual community needs – *whether they are for housing or for conservation*. The budget language directs one-time funds for housing only. We value VHCB's staff leadership and Board to assess and support the most critical needs in our communities.

We urge you to support VHCB at \$34.8M in FY22.

Respectfully,

Molly Dugan
Director of Policy and Strategic Initiatives, Cathedral Square
Co-Chair of Vermont Housing and Conservation Coalition