

MEMORANDUM

February 3, 2021

TO: House Committee on General , Housing and Military Affairs
FROM: Rick DeAngelis, Good Samaritan Haven
RE: Motel Safety and Security

Good Samaritan Haven has provided emergency shelter and services for 35 years in Central Vermont. In March 2020, we closed 3 congregate shelter facilities we were operating and moved 60 of our guests to area motels. Since then we have provided on-site staff at the Econolodge and the Hilltop Motels. Now, our staff is based at the Hilltop Inn (82 rooms) from which we provide outreach services to 314 individuals (adults and children) in seven motels who receive Emergency Services Division assistance. We work as part of the Washington County Homelessness Action Team. Last week you heard testimony from Sue Minter and Eileen Peltier about our joint effort.

Based on our experience, the following broad strategies are needed to enhance safety for motel guests, social service staff working in the motels and area communities:

The coordinated involvement of a range of partners is essential including various service agencies, local officials such as police and emergency services, State of Vermont agencies, motel owners and, of course, motel guests. This is no small order. In our experience, DCF has done a good job fostering this approach and been responsive to our calls for help. This approach needs to continue going forward.

We need to address several important safety related concerns in the motels including criminal behavior, self-harm and unsafe physical conditions: (1) The strategic involvement of security and police is effective in discouraging and preventing criminal behavior. We are glad to have their involvement and it needs to continue in coordination with other strategies. (2) Self harm stemming from isolation and other factors is also a major issue - social service, mental health and peer strategies should continue to be supported. (3) We have encountered very poor and sometimes unsafe physical conditions in some motels that are only addressed through complaints. We think a more systematic approach to insure safety should be explored.

The motels are a stop gap measure. We must look ahead to developing community based options that optimize service delivery in safe environments while bridging the transition to permanent housing. Although our numbers are second only to Chittenden among the counties, Washington County has an inadequate infrastructure to meet emergency housing needs for individuals and families. We need your support for funding to develop and operate those options.

I appreciate our interest in this issue and look forward to your questions and discussion.