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From the Office of the Mayor of Winooski

Kristine Lott, Mayor
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To: The House Government Operations Committee

Dear Committee Members,

As you consider H.448, Burlington's charter change to incorporate "just cause" evictions language, I wish to share a story about how eviction is impacting our community here in Winooski. Though this charter change won't impact us as a municipality, we care for our neighbors and are concerned about the impact of eviction on community members.

Just this past week, several of our community partners have reached out to me to alert us to an upcoming eviction here in Winooski at a multi-unit property that houses dozens of families, mostly of low income and the majority are BIPOC and refugee families. The property owner has notified tenants of 24 apartments that they will be evicted to accommodate renovations. This will be a major displacement. Many of the families that will be evicted are large families of low income and these families will likely not find replacement housing in our area.

Across our state we are experiencing a housing crisis that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. With vacancy rates already at an unhealthy low, and an influx of out of state and investor home purchases, housing prices and rents are soaring. Here in Winooski, our public housing authority is finding that families who receive a section 8 voucher for housing (something there is already a long waitlist for) cannot find units for rent within the price and size limits for the voucher. Many of the refugees we welcome in our state live in multi-generational families that require larger units and there is a very low supply of units larger than 2 bedrooms, as new ones are not being built.

This eviction is going to displace 2 dozen families from the homes they may have lived in for years and likely force them beyond our borders, away from their friends and neighbors, the school that supports them, stores and services they know, and accessible public transportation. I don't know the answers to this issue, but I hope this real-life story can help you as you consider the evictions laws.

Sincerely,
Kristine Lott
Mayor

