

4/7/2022

From the Office of the Mayor of Winooski

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To: House General Committee Members

Dear Legislators,

I'm here to testify in support of H.625 on behalf of the City of Winooski. I understand this bill would create a temporary moratorium on no-cause evictions, through June of next year; it would freeze rent increases for VERAP recipients; and it would provide protections against foreclosure actions, and tax sales for homeowners participating in VEHP. We know Vermont has been facing a growing housing crisis for years, exacerbated by the pandemic and the recent increase in investors in our housing market. I commend the State's efforts to provide rent and mortgage support throughout the pandemic, and to leverage federal funding to create new housing and address the short supply going forward. But we know it will take time to get the money out there, and get new housing created.

I'd like to speak about what just happened at 300 Main St. here in Winooski, where 24 households were served eviction notices so the owner could perform renovations to the property and move them from an affordable rent to a higher market rate. This action left support organizations scrambling to try to re-house these folks in a market that simply lacked enough units to relocate that many families at once. A quick search of the rental market in Winooski today shows me 5 rental units available, none of which are affordable. This is on trend with what we have seen in recent years, where even with the growth we experience in Winooski, the supply is not meeting the demand.

I have heard this story on a smaller scale from many residents who've been forced to move out of their homes, or received monthly rent increases of \$50, \$100 and higher, with no changes to the housing they are renting. My own neighbors faced a monthly rental increase of \$300 after the duplex they lived in was sold for over half a million dollars, a number unheard of in Winooski before the pandemic, and a number with a mortgage that can't be covered with an affordable rent. I have seen other neighbors hosting folks living in vans parked outside of their home, something I believe is indicative of growing instability in our housing market.

More than half of renters in my city are cost burdened, paying more than 30% of their income towards rent and a 1/3 are paying more than half of their earnings. Many homeowners in my city are cost



burdened as well, as low and fixed incomes don't keep pace with inflating costs in housing, in state and local taxes, and in critical goods and services like food and healthcare.

When families are forced to leave their homes, many aren't be able to stay in their community. Kids are displaced from schools that know how to support them. People are moved away from their neighbors, services, and supports that they know. Community connection is a key factor in creating safety, building trust, reducing crime, increasing health outcomes, all the things we want in our cities and towns.

The State has been working to fill the gap in housing here in Vermont, and while efforts like Building Homes Together have created new housing, the affordability target has fallen short. At a local level, we are working to update our zoning regulations to incentivize more affordable housing creation, but zoning updates take time to work through the public process. The Champlain Housing Trust is working to develop more affordable homes here, and our housing authority is working to get project-based vouchers out, but these efforts take time.

I believe the provisions in H.625 are necessary to buy time for federal funding, state programs, and local efforts to start to chip away at our need for more housing supply and more affordable housing. Our residents' incomes are not keeping up with the sky rocketing cost of housing, and they need protection while we all try to address this growing problem. Thank you for hearing me today and considering this legislation.

Sincerely,



Kristine Lott
Mayor

