

Dear Chair MacDonald and Members of the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules:

My name is Addie Lentzner. I am a high school senior at Arlington Memorial High School. I have been involved in advocacy around homelessness since Thierry Heuga, a man experiencing homelessness and family friend, died sleeping outside in Bennington. I believe that shelter is not a privilege but is a right. I applaud the work of Vermont to house everyone in motels, and I hope to see not only this program but this mindset of protecting the most vulnerable continue into the future.

Over the pandemic, people experiencing homelessness were housed in the GA Motel Program. Based on a rule created months ago before the pandemic, people were ushered out of motels in July and more were set to be if the pause didn't happen. The rule that the program should be transitioned out between July and now is arbitrary and not based on reasonable claims. With the COVID emergency, motel's willingness to continue, federal funds, and sustainability of the program, it is proven that the exiting rules are arbitrary. If this is the case, everybody including those exited previously should be allowed to return.

First, the program is sustainable. It should and could be used as a bridge to more permanent solutions such as permanent and transitional housing. In the next few months, the state should invest in housing so that people can transition directly from motels to housing without experiencing sleeping on a bench or in their car. Vermont needs to fully reinstate the program with federal funds until we can invest in enough permanent solutions like housing to warrant a large-scale decrease in the program. This would make the program sustainable.

Second, I called every single motel in the state who participated in GA and asked them whether or not they support the program and if they have capacity. 60 out of the 62 that I reached said they support it continuing, and the majority said they do have capacity starting in mid-October as leaf-peeping season slows down (which is now). Most motel owners believed the program was extremely beneficial and life-saving. One motel owner from Bennington told me that "One lady came here, she was crying because she was so grateful". Another told me that they are keeping people at discounted rates because they can't bear to kick anyone out. It is a myth that motels don't want to participate and don't have rooms, because they directly told me the opposite and described pushing people out in July as "killing people" as one former motel staff member told me. Attached is a letter signed by motels around the state with my research data. If it was so painful for motels to kick people out - motels being the very core of this program - any rule ending their involvement too soon would be arbitrary.

Third, there is federal FEMA money that could pay for a full reinstatement of the program. Why wouldn't we choose to use this when motels want to participate and it will save people from freezing to death this winter? Why wouldn't we choose to fully reinstate the program instead of just extending it for some; what is the downside of housing everyone when there is money for it and motels are willing? Why are we sticking to a rule that people need to be exited at a certain time when federal money could cover their return?

Fourth, the benefits of this program far outweigh any perceived complications. "If it wasn't for the program I'd pretty much be living under a bridge" said one client. "For once, it felt like somebody was doing something, not just saying something," said another.

Fifth, we are in a crisis. COVID is worse than before, yet we are leaving people on the streets. Any rule that keeps people homeless and exposed to a disease must be arbitrary and should be amended. The near thousand people exited in July deserve to be back in the GA Motel Program.

This program is not a privilege that just comes during a pandemic. It should be perceived as a human right that is utilized until permanent solutions are in place. I urge you to tell the administration that any rule that does not fully reinstate the GA Motel Program is inhumane and should not be tolerated.

In order to show we as Vermont truly care about our most vulnerable, we need to fully extend the GA Motel Program. Extending the program for those already in it and not those previously exited is irrational when motel rooms are available and we have the funding to pay for the program, and there is an ongoing public health emergency and nowhere for people to go. Therefore, any extension must include those exited in July. Anything less is a half-measure and is inhumane, simply following an arbitrary law without considering its present effects.

9/21/21

Dear Governor Scott and Commissioner Brown,

We are all motel and hotel management from around the state who have participated in the GA Motel Program. For the past year and a half, we have sheltered Vermonters experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. We have not only housed people, but we have become supports for and friends with clients staying here. Many of us felt as if we did the most meaningful work alongside folks experiencing homelessness in this last year, helping house our community during a worldwide pandemic.

After this past year, we are extremely concerned to see that people are again becoming homeless. We have spent the last year helping people build bridges to stability in their lives; on July 1st, that stability began collapsing. On September 23rd, when five hundred more households will be exited, even more people will be sleeping in tents and on the streets yet again.

We as motels and hotels support continuing the GA Motel Program using federal FEMA money until December 31st. We believe that this program could be used to end homelessness in our state; it could be a bridge to transitional and permanent housing. It is economically beneficial to end homelessness in our state. We spend thousands of dollars of taxpayer money on shelters and temporary solutions each year. Why not use FEMA money to pay for an extension of the motel program and build housing using ARPA funds, decreasing the economic effects of homelessness long into the future? However, it's not the economic effects that are most important. What is important is the family sleeping in the local park while motel rooms have open arms across the street.

We as motel owners call on Governor Scott to use the federal money to reinstate the GA Motel Program through December, and ensure that there is safe and consistent housing available when the time comes to transition out. At this point, every available motel room should be used for shelter.

Now is the time to act before almost six hundred people are kicked out.

Thank you for your consideration,

SIGNED,

CountrySide Motel
Fife and Drum Motel
Deer Run Motor Inn
Fairbanks Inn
The Golden Eagle
Ladd Brook Motel
Windsor Motel
West Rd. Motel
South Gate Motel
Sugarhouse Motel
Starlight Motel
Sonesta Suites Burlington
Shady Lawn Motel
Rodeway Inn Bellows Falls
Travel Inn
Pierre Motel

Magic View Motel
Econo Lodge Brattleboro
Apple Valley Inn and Cafe
Econo Lodge St. Albans
Black Mountain Inn
Brandon Motor Lodge
Highlander Inn
Maurice's Motel
North Star Motel
Pinecrest Motel and Cabins
Quality Inn Colchester
South on 5 Motel
Rodeway Inn East
Woodstock Ave Rutland
Bradford Motel
Best Western Bennington

Bennington Motor Inn
Budget Inn
Cadillac Motel
Days Inn Colchester
Days Inn Shelburne
Econo lodge Montpelier
Fairbanks Inn
Knoll Motel
Middlebury Sweets
Swanton Motel
White River Inn and Suites
Hollow Inn
Midtown Motel
Europa