

October 6, 2021

Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules
Via e-mail to Charlene Dindo

To the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules:

I am writing this letter to ask the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules to review the Agency of Human Services' General Assistance Emergency Housing Program (GA) rules pursuant to its authority under 3 V.S.A. § 817(c) and object to the 84-day durational limit on program benefits.

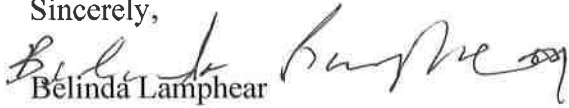
I am a lifelong Vermonter. I worked for over thirty years at Washington County Mental Health working with children with developmental disabilities and as a family support specialist. I have never been in trouble with the law. I have always tried to help my neighbors. People say I'm a good person. But sometimes bad things happen to good people.

I lost my housing because without a subsidy, there is no way to afford Vermont rents on disability benefits alone. I wish I were still healthy, but over the years, I have developed several serious medical conditions. I have diabetes, a blood disorder, and heart problems. Last year, my foot had to be amputated. I'm hoping to get heart valve surgery and to better manage my medical conditions so that I can go back to work, but for now, my only income is SSDI. There isn't enough affordable housing for everyone in Vermont who needs it, and that's how I ended up homeless. Thanks to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program, I've been able to stay safely sheltered throughout the pandemic. The Department for Children and Families placed me at the Hilltop Inn in Berlin. Without GA, I wouldn't have anywhere else to go. I guess I would live in my car, but I know I would end up in the hospital. Honestly, I worry I would die. I'm too sick to be without shelter.

Under the current GA program rules, I don't think qualify for an extension, and I would have been terminated from the program on September 23rd but for the Governor's "pause" on terminations until October 21, 2021. I appreciate the "pause," but I think the Department needs to change the rules to get rid of the 84-day limit on benefits. First, because of my health conditions, I'm still very much at risk of getting severely ill from COVID-19 even though I'm vaccinated, and I'll be unable to protect myself from coronavirus if I don't have shelter. Second, I know that Vermont is building more affordable housing and that there's rental assistance available, but for now, there's still no place to rent. There might be new development in the works, but it isn't ready yet. I check everywhere – Craigslist, property management websites, signs I see around town – but there is just nothing available. When FEMA is willing to pay for me to stay in a motel, and there's no place else to go, I think it doesn't make sense for the government to put me out onto the streets or my car where I could die or get really sick.

There is a public health emergency across the country. And there's an emergency in our rental housing market in Vermont. Before the Governor's "pause" on terminating me from the GA program runs out on October 21, please review the GA program rules and object to them.

Sincerely,


Belinda Lamphear