

Thank you members of the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Tina Gray-Rand. I am currently experiencing homelessness and I am in the General Assistance emergency housing program. I am grateful for this program because without it, I'd be outside and my health and safety would be at risk.

I have experienced tremendous stress this last month, not knowing where I would be as of October 21. The program rules say that we only get 84 days of benefits, but certain people with disabilities are eligible for an extension. I had applied for an extension due to my disability in the beginning of October, but the Department never approved or denied that application. So I was relieved, on Monday the 18th, to hear on the news that the "pause" in terminations from the program was extended until the end of the year. Without that, I think I would have been on the streets today. But it doesn't seem right that I never got a written notice from the Department about this change. Instead, on the afternoon of the 18th, I got a call from a worker at the Department, and she told me that my motel voucher was extended until November 4. She didn't say anything about the pause until December 31. She didn't say anything about my request for an extension as a person with a disability. I still don't have anything in writing from the Department.

What's happening now is all really confusing because the rules haven't changed and I haven't gotten any written notice from the Department about what benefits I'm receiving. I don't think it's fair that the people in the program are left guessing about what our rights are.

Also, I want to give feedback to the Department on what the rules should be. Right now, it doesn't feel like the rules are going to do what they are supposed to do: protect vulnerable Vermonters experiencing homelessness during this public health crisis. I would like to have the opportunity to be heard by the Department.

I am grateful to this Committee to let me speak today. I hope you will ask the Department to address the problems with their rules and give people like me the chance to be heard.

Thank you.