

February 23, 2021

Senator Christopher Bray, Chair
Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee
Vermont General Assembly
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

RE: National best practices in **Comprehensive Energy Savings Programs**

Green & Healthy Homes Initiative – National Leaders in Innovative Holistic Housing Solutions

I am Catherine Klinger, Vice President of Client Services for the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative (GHHI). Founded in Baltimore, Maryland in 1986, GHHI has grown to become the nation's largest healthy homes nonprofit, dedicated to addressing the social determinants of health and advancing racial and health equity through the creation of healthy, safe, and energy efficient homes. GHHI works with national, statewide and local partners to advance policies and best practices that improve the housing conditions to achieve better health outcomes and reduce energy burdens for families and communities. Among GHHI's achievements, GHHI's model for providing holistic housing, health and energy interventions was the basis for the design of HUD's first ever Healthy Homes and Weatherization Cooperation Demonstration Grant Program in September of 2020.

I lead a team of national professionals providing technical assistance to states, counties and communities including Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York State, New Jersey, Memphis, TN, and Jackson, MS, in setting policies and providing services that support healthy, safe and energy efficient housing, with a focus on advancing racial and health equity through program planning, implementation and evaluation, policy advocacy and stakeholder engagement.

The Role of Residential Retrofits in Comprehensive Energy Savings

The installation of cleaner energy measures in residential buildings will a move a significant portion of energy utilization to renewable electric power sources, advancing Vermont toward the achievement of greenhouse gas emission reduction goal named in the 2016 Comprehensive State Energy Plan – moving 67% of power utilization to renewable electric sources by 2025.

Holistic Approach to Housing Energy Retrofits

However the move to retrofit residential properties to renewable electric sources risks leaving low-income households behind. In Vermont, the highest energy-burdened neighborhoods pay an average of 27% of their annual income on energy costs, and over 125,000 Vermonters are fuel poor (pay more than 10% of their annual income on energy costs)^{1,2}. Moving from fuel-source heating and energy systems to electric is likely to raise household energy costs further. This increase must be mitigated by energy efficiency interventions to reduce energy waste and lower energy burdens for these residents.

¹ Vermont Energy Investment Corporation, *Energy Burden in Vermont: Geographic Patterns in Vermonter's Thermal, Electric and Transportation Energy Use*, July, 2016.

² Energy Security and Justice Program of Vermont Law School's Institute for Energy and the Environment, *Energy Costs and Burdens in Vermont: Burdensome for Whom?*, December, 2014.

GHHI's national experience providing direct interventions to families in low-to-moderate income properties, and planning and evaluating holistic housing intervention programs, indicate that most low-income properties will require health and safety related repairs to be eligible to receive energy upgrades – either through the federally-supported Weatherization Assistance Program or utility rate payer-funded energy efficiency programs.

These repairs often include remediation of lead-based paint, addressing sources of moisture infiltration and mold remediation, remediation of asbestos-like material and addressing outdated electrical systems (knob and tube wiring). Many of these interventions are directly related to environmental health conditions including lead poisoning, asthma, and injury risk. In addition, weatherization measures improve health outcomes by reducing exposure to extreme temperatures.

Thus, a holistic approach to housing health and energy interventions result in long-term transformative benefits that generate costs savings across the housing, health and energy sectors.

Holistic housing interventions advance racial and health equity by mitigating the legacy of racist housing policies and addressing environmental hazards that disproportionately impact Black and Brown residents. Building sustainable support for holistic housing interventions and a framework for service delivery at-scale also creates demand for a healthy homes and energy efficiency workforce – advancing economic mobility and Vermont's 2016 Comprehensive Energy Plan goal of "improving labor market conditions by creating well-paying jobs in renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors".

Examples of Cross-Sector Investment in Housing Health, Safety and Energy-efficiency

GHHI is working with the New York State Department of Energy Research and Development (NYSERDA) to plan and implement a multi-site holistic healthy homes pilot funded through utility rate payer funds, and designed to leverage the state's mandate that Medicaid Managed Care Organizations contract with community-based providers to address social determinants of health in year 2 of the pilot. Contractors participating in the state's Empower energy efficiency program will be contracted to provide healthy homes interventions addressing asthma triggers, aligned with evidence-based asthma home visiting. Pilot evaluation will track changes in the total cost of care for participating MCO members.

In Connecticut, GHHI is working with the Connecticut Green Bank, Department of Health and six other state agencies to plan and implement a cross-sector, statewide holistic housing program that unlocks Medicaid and other cross-sector funding to support holistic healthy housing interventions alongside the state's robust Housing Energy Solutions (HES), utility rate payer-funded energy efficiency program. The proposed multi-site pilot will launch in 2021, and incorporate interventions that address household injury risks and asthma triggers, and evaluation will include analysis of reductions in the total cost of medical care for Medicaid enrollees participating in the program. The goal is to scale up a statewide service delivery framework for health, safety and energy efficiency interventions, supported by Medicaid investment, utility funding, and other federal, state and philanthropic investment.

In 2021, New Jersey has dedicated state funding to plan and implement a 'Whole House' pilot, designed to test the operational and health and energy impacts of a holistic health and energy housing intervention program, linked to the state's goal of residential electrification. The Rhode Island Department of Energy Resources is convening a workgroup to make recommendations to increase

equity in access to energy efficiency services and link residential health and energy efforts to the state's climate goals.

Opportunity in VT

Vermont's leadership in setting greenhouse gas emission reduction goals creates an opportunity to link GHG emission reduction with evidence-based interventions that advance racial and health equity and make transformative impacts for Vermonters.