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Testimony from Frank Knaack, HHAV Executive Director, before the House Committee on Appropriations regarding the Budget Adjustment Act.

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The Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont (HHAV) represents a merger of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition and the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness, two organizations with deep-rooted histories in our state. As a merged organization, HHAV leverages the expertise of our board and over 60 member organizations to meet the needs of vulnerable Vermonters and advocate for effective policies to ensure that all people living in Vermont have safe, stable, affordable homes and if homelessness occurs, it is brief, rare, and non-recurring.

We thank the legislature and administration for the investments you all have made, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, to:

- Temporarily shelter the most vulnerable in our communities;
- Accelerate the production of affordable housing; and
- Bolster the services necessary to aid Vermonters in obtaining housing and achieving housing stability.

The BAA offers the opportunity to build on these investments, which are urgently needed. As we learned from the 2023 Point in Time count, last year Vermont had the 2nd highest rate of unhoused people per capita in the country.ⁱ But, thanks to your investments, last year Vermont also sheltered the highest rate of unhoused people per capita in the country.ⁱⁱ It's clear that Vermont cares, but we are concerned that part of the administration's BAA proposal would allow our state to backslide.

The BAA must ensure that no additional Vermonters are pushed out of temporary housing on April 1. The administration admits that its plan falls short of housing all of the individuals in the June cohort who face becoming unhoused on April 1.ⁱⁱⁱ Households in the June cohort represent some of the most vulnerable Vermonters, including people over 60 years old, people with disabilities, and families with children.^{iv} (And, this does not include the additional 600-700 households accessing hotels and motels under the GA Adverse Weather Conditions eligibility, who will lose their housing on March 15, 2024.) Our political leaders must not only ensure that these vulnerable Vermonters are sheltered and supported, but also ensure that individuals and households currently temporarily housed under the GA Adverse Weather program who meet

the June Cohort criteria are also able to fully participate in that program. We urge the legislature to add an additional \$12 million to the administration's recommended BAA to ensure those temporarily housed under the three emergency housing categories will remain temporary housed if appropriate alternative options cannot be found.

In addition, HHAV urges the legislature to ensure the BAA includes funding for the programs this body identified last session (as part of S. 100) as priorities for creating longer-term solutions to Vermont's housing and homelessness crisis, including:

- \$50 million for the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board to both fund the existing pipeline of permanently affordable housing projects and provide a clear signal to the permanently affordable housing community that they should continue to pursue new projects.
- \$25 million for the Vermont Housing Finance Agency's Homeownership Development program (formerly known as the Missing Middle program). This would fund approximately 135-145 homes.
- \$2.5 million for rental arrears funds.
- \$1 million for the tenant representation pilot through Vermont Legal Aid.
- \$500K for Rental Housing Stabilization through the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity.

HHAV is ready to bring its deep expertise to help solve the short-term emergency housing crisis. HHAV's membership includes over 60 frontline housing and shelter organizations, and we would welcome the opportunity to work with the administration and legislature to design and establish a state-run program that provides safe and habitable short-term emergency housing for all households experiencing homelessness. But, this process cannot be completed by April 1, when the June cohort face becoming unhoused. The legislature must amend the BAA to ensure that vulnerable Vermonters are sheltered and supported while this process takes place.

ⁱ U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1 - PIT Estimates of Homelessness, Dec. 2023, p. 16, available at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development, The 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress, Part 1 - PIT Estimates of Homelessness, Dec. 2023, p. 30, available at <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2023-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Testimony of Commissioner Winters before the House General and Housing Committee, Jan 9, 2023, at 53:03, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8P8BFP2p_Vw.

^{iv} See Department for Children & Families (DCF) Housing Presentation, Jan. 9, 2024, available at [https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/WorkGroups/House%20General/Housing/W~Chris%20Winters~Department%20for%20Children%20and%20Families%20\(DCF\)%20Housing%20Presentation~1-9-2024.pdf](https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/WorkGroups/House%20General/Housing/W~Chris%20Winters~Department%20for%20Children%20and%20Families%20(DCF)%20Housing%20Presentation~1-9-2024.pdf).