

# Vermont State Housing Authority



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To: Tom Stevens, Chair, House Committee on General and Housing  
Copy: Jean Murray, Vermont Legal Aid  
From: Kathleen Berk, Vermont State Housing Authority *Kathleen F. Berk*  
Date: January 10, 2024  
Re: Budget Adjustment Act, Act 47, sections 43, 44, 45 (an act relating to eviction diversion, conflict resolution, and providing services to preserve tenancies)

People in crisis need a streamlined, one-stop shop of immediate support. The Eviction Diversion program, passed as part of S.100 last biennium, will provide necessary, proven resources, and strengthen our network of providers across the eviction and homelessness prevention ecosystem.

According to the 2023 Annual Homeless Assessment Report released by HUD, Vermont has the second highest rate of homelessness in the United States. According to the same report, Vermont also had the greatest percentage increase of homelessness in the country between 2007 and 2023 (218%). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, "areas with the highest cost of living, especially high housing costs, also have higher rates of homelessness".

During the last biennium, Act 47 (sections 43, 44, 45) was enacted into law, but not funded.

On behalf of Vermonter's who are at-risk of eviction and potentially homelessness, we urge the full funding of S.100, Act 47, section 43, 44, 45, as part of the Budget Adjustment Act (BAA).

### BAA Request:

Sec. 43, Diversion Services, statewide	\$ 400,000
Sec. 44, Tenant full representation 2-year pilot, 2 counties	\$1,025,000
Rent Arrearage Assistance - VSHA	<u>\$2,500,000</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>\$3,925,000</b>

As predicted, with the ending of the Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program, known as VERAP, evictions have escalated here in Vermont. According to recent data provided by Vermont Legal Aid, over 530 more evictions were filed in calendar year 2023 than were filed in 2022.

To prevent eviction, Act 47 includes three programs. Eviction diversion services, Tenant full representation pilot, and Rent Assistance.

We understand that the rental arrears portion of Act 47 (Section 45) is seen by many lawmakers as duplicative of the Housing Opportunities Program (HOP) administered by the Office of Economic Opportunity; however, HOP, although similar to Section 47, is not duplicative.

HOP is limited in most areas to households with incomes at 30% of Area Median Income (AMI) and below and limits rent arrears to just three months.





Section 47 of this bill would serve households up to 80% of AMI and would not cap back rent arrears but would limit funding to households that have sustainable tenancies.

We echo concerns of lawmakers that funding multiple programs with similar uses is confusing: not only to practitioners; but, most importantly to the households the benefits are intended to serve.

We urge the funding of act 47 in it entirely now. Section 45 of the Act will reach a much larger segment of Vermont's population than the available HOP program and ask the legislature to direct stakeholders and administrators to streamline similar programs, proving for expanded uses and eligibility.

Streamlining of programs will take time. In the meantime, as we strive to prevent eviction for sustainable tenancies for Vermonters, in a post-pandemic world where existing vulnerabilities of our working families have exacerbated housing burdens and revealed new ones, we urge the funding, through the Budget Adjustment Act, Act 47 sections 43, 44, 45, committing to a new way to serve vulnerable renters across Vermont.