

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)

Housing and Homelessness

Testimony to House General on 1.27.23





CVOEO: Bridging Gaps and Building Futures

CVOEO provides individuals and families with the basic needs of food, fuel, and housing support in times of crisis, and helps them acquire the necessary education, financial skills, and assets to build a stable future in which they thrive.

Services include:

Housing Education and Advocacy; Homeless Services; Head Start; Financial Education and Microbusiness Development; Food Access Programs; Benefit Assistance; Tax Assistance and Preparation; Weatherization Services; and more!

We served 20,200 Vermonters last year.

“What motivates me to do this work? A strong belief that food, housing, and healthcare are human rights.”

Midhat, Food Service Manager, Feeding Chittenden

“You know that old saying, “it takes a village to raise a child”? I feel like I’ve been a part of that village during the last 30 years I’ve worked with CVOEO.”

Mary, Family Support Specialist, Champlain Valley Head Start

“At CVOEO we want every person to leave the room a little better off than when they came in. We all work toward a dream of ending poverty, discrimination, and homelessness, but our day-to-day is simply about making sure the people we work with know they’re valued and capable of greatness.”

Ben, Director, Samaritan House

CVOEO Housing Programs and Services

Community Action Housing Advocates

Addison, Chittenden, Franklin, and Grand Isle Counties - Served over **1650** unique individuals experiencing homelessness in 2022.

Community Resource Center

Burlington - Served **1070** individuals last year and serves **85 to 150** individuals experiencing homelessness daily with hot meals, clinics, essential needs, access to housing and benefits, and more.

Community Outreach, Resource and Advocacy

Chittenden County - Served **650 people** living on the street and in encampments with mobile outreach, care coordination, referrals, food, computer access, essential needs, and access to housing and benefits.

Elmwood Avenue Emergency Housing

Burlington - Provide care coordination and access to housing.

Samaritan House

St. Albans - Emergency housing and support services.

Voices Against Violence/Laurie's House

St. Albans - Emergency housing for victims/survivors of domestic and sexual violence.

HOME Family Voucher Program

Statewide - Rapid rehousing for **100** families.

Fair Housing Programs

Statewide - Education, advocacy, prevention, technical assistance, and referrals for people and organizations.

Tenant Rights

Statewide - Education, mediation, and prevention.

Mobile Home Program

Statewide - Care coordination, education, advocacy, and community organizing.

Short-term (12 months) actions:

- Place people in the Transitional Housing Program into the General Assistance Program under adverse weather rules until at least June 30.
- Support the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition's request for affordable housing by investing 55 million to maintain the current pipeline.
- Update the Roadmap to End Homelessness, reconvene the Vermont Council on Homelessness and the Child Poverty Council, and convene an Emergency Task Force on Homelessness.
- Increase the wages and benefits of shelter providers to promote recruitment and stability.
- Shelter spaces should be low-barrier, trauma-informed, and gradually turned into single resident occupancies.
- Engage health, mental health, and substance use providers to work consistently and formally with homeless providers (ex: Health Equity Grant).
- Receive more financial and clinical support from medical providers for the respite and after care that is provided at our shelter system.
- Fund a state-wide risk pool for landlords that rent to people experiencing homelessness.
- Pass Just Cause Eviction.
- Raise the percentage of housing in the pipeline to be designated to people experiencing homelessness from 15% to 30%.
- Identify statewide sites for redevelopment/reuse (potential both immediately and long-term) for emergency, transitional, and permanent housing.
- Advocate for zoning laws including safe camp sites and places where people can park without being removed.

Medium-term (12-24 months) actions:

- Create Single Room Occupancy (SRO) for temporary housing use with the goal of converting these SRO units into permanent studio and 1-BR apartments over time.
- Create community outreach teams to connect people to shelter, benefits, and essential needs.
- Establish and enhance community resource centers in larger towns for people to receive services and, as importantly, connect to the community.
- Understand how and why many people are losing housing and invest in landlord and tenant mediation to reduce evictions.

Long-term (24 months) actions:

- Create specialized emergency housing options that are modeled on community care homes for people who need a higher level of care (data on People in Emergency Housing with Chronic Health Conditions is in the DCF legislative briefing from 1.17.23).
- Mobile Homes as Affordable Housing - Mobile homes are a good option for affordable housing, but not if these communities do not have ownership, are poorly built and maintained, or built out of site and disconnected from community and services.
- Create a hub for recruiting and training shelter and services staff. Consult with UVM's Office of Engagement.

Solving Child Homelessness

We can solve child homelessness with immediate, strategic investments.



Child Homelessness in Vermont: 2016 to 2023

The **2016** point-in-time (PIT) recorded a 28% reduction in the number of homeless individuals statewide—the largest one-year decrease in a PIT count in the nation in 2016. **156** households had children, or 20% of total households counted.

The **2022** PIT count shows the number of people in households with children under 18 **increased by 130%** from pre-pandemic levels, from **629** in 2019 to **857** in 2022.

Today, approximately **450** families and **approximately 600 children** are experiencing homelessness in Vermont (DCF Data – January 2023).

Risks Due to Child Homelessness

Children experiencing homelessness:

- have higher levels of emotional and behavioral problems;
- have increased risk of serious health problems;
- are more likely to experience separations from their families;
- experience more school mobility, are more likely to repeat a grade, be expelled or drop out of school, and have lower academic performance; and
- are are more likely to experience homelessness as adults.



- [Children and Families - National Alliance to End Homelessness](#)
- [Risk and Resilience Factors for Youth Homelessness in Western Countries: A Systematic Review - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#)
- [ChapinHall VoYC NationalReport Final.pdf \(voicesofyouthcount.org\)](#)

Strategies and Interventions that Work

Affordable Housing - *Housing for which the occupant(s) is/are paying no more than 30 percent of income for gross housing costs, including utilities.*

Rapid Rehousing with Rental Subsidies - *Intervention that rapidly connects families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing through time-limited financial assistance.*

Support Services/Prevention - Targeted support and coordination of services to place and keep people in housing.



Census data show a 2.4% - 4.2% rental vacancy rate for Vermont in **2022**. (Margin of error - 1.7% - 2.3%)*

A Healthy Vacancy Rate is Between 5% and 7%.

*www.census.gov/housing/hvs/data/rates.html

Solving Child Homelessness NOW

- Include in the Budget Adjustment an additional \$2.1 million in rental subsidies to rapidly rehouse families. This is an *additional \$2.1 million* to the \$3 million in the Cares Housing Voucher Program already in the BAA.
- Include in Budget Adjustment \$1.5 million this year, and *then annually*, to increase support services for families through the Family Supportive Housing Program. This State investment will be matched with Medicaid Funding under the Targeted Case Management category.
- Include an additional \$3.5 million in 2024 to sustain the rental subsidies and rapidly rehouse approximately 200 families.
- Include \$2 million annually to continue to house an estimated 80 families coming into homelessness each year.

“It was rough. It’s rough, for sure, not having a place to go and it doesn't make you feel very good. I went through a time where everything was coming to a head and then I had this thrown on my plate now, too. It was just like, you know, no sideboards, and it's spilling out the freaking side. And I was in a dark place where I thought maybe, you know, I might be better off not being here anymore.”

- Sean

*Homelessness is a community problem,
and we need a whole community solution.*

