

Testimony by Colby Lynch
Joint Committee: House General & Housing and House Human Services
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My name is Colby Lynch and I currently live at the Quality Inn in Barre.

First, I'd like to give a bit of background information on how exactly my partner and I found ourselves living in a hotel room. When the pandemic began, we were both homecare providers. Tyler had been working with an agency out of Moretown for over a decade. He was great at "the job" of caregiving and I was relatively new though my background as a single parent prepared me well. All was going smoothly with work, however our living situation became a precarious one. The owner of the house we were renting (to the tune of \$1600 per month) had plans to sell the property and needed to fix it up. I was hoping that we could continue staying there through this transition but that was not the case.

We had been given a notice to vacate within three months. At the time, we really didn't think it was that big of a deal other than the arduous task of moving our belongings during "mud season." We secured a room through Front Porch Forum and moved in at the beginning of May 2021. Despite our desire to make the living situation work, we recognized that we had to leave what had become an unhealthy living situation. By that time, it was the height of the housing crisis and there were no options available, no matter how much money you made. So we found ourselves living in our van. When you are living in a vehicle and the temperatures are getting down to 28 degrees, it is a life changing experience. One I have still not fully recovered from.

We moved into a hotel room on November 4th, 2021. We were just glad to be somewhere warm and not living in our vehicles. But I want to stress the reality that ***motel rooms are for vacations or weekend excursions, not everyday life.***

For example, I am grateful for the lady who reached out when I posted our story on the Hunger Mountain Coop Community Board. She allowed me to use her camp stove so I could boil some water and correctly put away my garden goods for the winter. I used to take pride in the ability to grow food and can it properly. When I had a kitchen, I was quite the entertainer with elaborate meals that were the outcome of my garden growing ventures. I don't get to entertain much these days.

In the motel room, we have a microwave and a one pot coffee maker. The set of drawers to keep our clothing in were all busted before we moved in. I keep my clothing in the armoire and in laundry baskets stacked on top of each other. It is quite the ordeal to put together a simple matching outfit sometimes. These days, I work with the public waiting tables and bartending. Wearing dirty, ill-fitting or damaged clothes is not a good look when you have this sort of job.

I could go on but my main message is this: if there were housing units available, then we would be in one right now. Vermont has no housing safety-net. We had to switch careers because if we make even \$60 more than we currently make at low wage jobs, we would not be able to stay at the hotel. But this is a chicken and egg situation. Even if

we find housing, we have to show that we can afford it. But we can't secure more lucrative income sources because if we do, we are kicked out of our current situation and would be homeless again. We see signs that everywhere is hiring. But having no homes available to rent is impacting folks' ability to apply for these jobs. If this great need for unavailable housing persists, Vermont will lose a lot of good workers.

It is comforting to know that there are those who hold public office that do truly care. That being said, I shouldn't have to feel like I'm violating community standards just by simply existing. These days, the weariness of the situation has my spirits draining rapidly. I know that I'm physically and mentally a strong individual, capable of a lot of good. I'm a mother to a grown boy, a visionary artist and a worthy confidante. I enjoy a good laugh even at the expense of myself. But having no place to live is no laughing matter. The debasing stereotypes towards the homeless need to be eradicated from public dissent.

Perhaps the day will come when I can look back and chuckle at the desperation behind emptying my middle-age bladder in a Fage yogurt container in the dead of the early morning, freezing my behind off in the car because the water pump in the van went out...again.

Or waiting in anticipation for the dreaded "cop knock" on the van window assaulting my precious sleep just to make sure "everything is OK."

A day will come when I'm able to stretch out on my own couch again or have access to a table to do my art in my own space or cook in my own kitchen so I can entertain friends and family at my dinner table.

A situation such as this can be debasing and destabilizing. I am thankful that I can choose for it not to be demoralizing. I have made a few friends at the motel. Grit and candor and I like to think wisdom has pulled me through this experience thus far. I only wish to use my testimony as a way of addressing the issues, acting and moving forward.

The words of Eleanor Roosevelt have become clear to me in these chaotic times: "No one can make you feel inferior without your consent." I will end on this note...