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May 4, 2023

Dear Members of the Committee of Conference on H.494,

Hunger Free Vermont writes to urge you to include funding for the hundreds of people currently being housed in hotels who have been unable to secure other housing in the FY 2024 budget.

While we applaud the Legislature's commitment to address the affordable housing crisis in Vermont, at the present time, there simply are not other viable, safe, minimally acceptable housing options available for most of these members of our communities.

Along with our many partner organizations who work to end hunger and food insecurity in Vermont, we understand that while we work to make the systemic changes that will permanently reduce the number of people who ever have to face hunger and malnutrition, people are experiencing the crisis of hunger right now, and their immediate needs must be met. The crisis of unhoused Vermonters demands the same two-track approach.

Every one of our direct service partners, from Community Action Agencies to food shelves to community meal sites and more, are already over-capacity and overwhelmed. Local and regional nonprofit organizations will not be able to step in to mitigate the suffering that is about to ensue. The Legislature's decision to permit hundreds of people, many of whom are elderly, have disabilities, and/or have children, to be left without any form of shelter or support, will have dire consequences for them and for our communities.

Hunger is already at an all-time high, federal benefit boosts have ended, and pandemic-era philanthropic giving has receded as well. We in the nonprofit sector cannot step in. It is government's responsibility to keep people housed now, as a fundamental matter of safety and dignity, while new housing solutions are developed and built.

Hunger Free Vermont urges you to include funding to extend the hotel housing program in the FY 2024 budget. Thank you for your consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. Anore Horton".

Anore Horton, Executive Director

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