

Dear Members of the Committee of Conference for H 494:

I am writing on behalf of an ad hoc coalition of service providers from across the state who deliver direct services to vulnerable and unhoused Vermonters. We write with grave concerns around the changes ahead resulting from the end of federal housing supports -- not only for the Vermonters in search of a safe place to call home, but also for the communities who will be assisting with this transition. As you reach the home stretch of the FY24 budget, we are requesting the changes below within the appropriations bill to help provide a bridge to the end of federally funded services, and to help manage the unprecedented numbers of Vermonters who will be exiting motels.

Thank you in advance for considering these changes as our front-line workers continue to try to find safe options for those impacted by funding reductions. We will continue to work tirelessly to support and house vulnerable Vermonters. At the same time, we are united in articulating to our state leadership we are doing all we can with the resources we share.

1) Support House- Passed \$10 million for supportive services:

H.494 as passed by the House included \$10 million for, “community action agencies, housing opportunity programs, and other relevant stakeholders to locate alternative housing and supportive services for individuals utilizing the hotel and motel housing program established in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency.” (Sec. E.321.1.)

This appropriation is not included in H.494 as approved by the Senate and we ask that the conference committee reinstate this appropriation.

Specifically, we ask that \$10 million be appropriated to OEO to provide one-time supplemental grants for the purposes outlined in the House bill, “to locate alternative housing and supportive services for individuals utilizing the hotel and motel housing program.” Grants would be offered through the Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) and provide grantees with the flexibility to respond to emergency, short-term, and long-term housing needs of those experiencing homelessness. Uses could include, but not be limited to, campsite fees and camping equipment, apartment furniture and appliances, car repairs, transportation costs including relocating within Vermont or out of state, childcare, food, and other costs related to housing and safety, including grantees’ administrative expenses.

2) Re-Set Time Allowed for General Assistance

In order to extend support for emergency assistance to those in need we request that any individual who is otherwise eligible for general assistance except for having already met the maximum number of days of temporary housing allowable in the 12-

month period prior to July 1, 2023, will be deemed to have used 0 days of temporary housing benefit as of July 1, 2023.

3) Require Winter Safety Policy allowances throughout the cold weather period

Sec. E.321 GENERAL ASSISTANCE HOUSING: ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS (a) The Commissioner for Children and Families ~~shall~~ ~~may~~, by **Winter Safety** policy, provide temporary housing for a limited duration in adverse weather conditions when appropriate shelter space is not available.

Signed:

Capstone Community Action (Washington, Lamoille, and Orange Counties)

Cathedral Square (statewide)

Champlain Housing Trust (Northwest Vermont)

Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (Chittenden, Addison, Franklin & Grant Isle County)

Charter House Coalition (Middlebury)

Committee on Temporary Shelter (Chittenden County)

Family Center of Washington County (Washington County)

Good Samaritan Haven (Washington County)

Groundworks Collaborative (Brattleboro)

Homeless Prevention Center (Rutland County)

John Graham Housing & Services (Addison County)

Lamoille Community House (Lamoille County)

Northeast Kingdom Community Action (Northeast Kingdom)

Spectrum Youth & Family Services (Chittenden, Franklin & Grand Isle County)

Springfield Supported Housing Program (Springfield)

Upper Valley Haven (Hartford/Upper Valley)

Vermont Legal Aid (statewide)

Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence (statewide)