



TO: Vermont Senate Appropriations Committee
RE: FY 2024 Budget Testimony of the Good Samaritan Haven
DATE: March 2, 2023

This testimony focuses on the response to homelessness and, specifically, the role of the state's emergency shelter network and service providers.

The Good Samaritan Haven provides shelter and services to individual adults experiencing homelessness in Washington County. We operate 3 shelters with over 60 beds in three towns, a hotel based service program, a seasonal warming shelter, a street outreach team for the unsheltered and a COVID safety program.

No matter how the State addresses the homeless population in hotels it is clear that the need for the emergency shelter system will continue and probably grow.

The level of homelessness in our State is at record levels and a bold initiative from the State of Vermont is warranted. In Washington County, 482 individuals were counted as homeless in hotels, shelters and unsheltered in October, 2022. This is a per capita rate of 80 per 10,000 population or about twice the rate of the State as a whole.

We see it every day at Good Sam - the emergency shelter system has become the place where individuals land when they fall out of other systems including the housing, mental health, healthcare, corrections, substance abuse and aging systems. Nearly 80% of our shelter guests report having a disabling mental health condition. Over 30% report alcohol and drug abuse as disabling conditions. Many have chronic health conditions. As a whole this is a challenging population to safely house and provide services to and the demand for shelter will only grow greater in the near to medium future.

These factors place tremendous pressure on emergency shelters and service providers. Every day we face challenging and complex situations that we are often ill-equipped to respond to. Over the last year we have had several violent acts in our shelter system including a recent stabbing at our Montpelier Warming Station.

Despite the importance of the shelter system, the funding of shelter staffing, services and management is inadequate contributing to understaffing, inadequately trained staff, and high turnover rates. Like other Vermont shelter

programs, about 60-70% of Good Sam's funding comes from the Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP) of the AHS Office of Economic Opportunity. In our experience, HOP funding is insufficiently scaled and too narrowly focused to support a robust shelter system. More funding for HOP is needed as well as some specific changes in its focus, including:

1. More flexibility in the use of HOP funds for staffing so that HOP funds can be used for staff who provide safety and training, crisis management, shelter guest healthcare coordination, shelter guest food and transportation management, and other critical needs. Current funding is very narrowly focused on "shelter coordination" and "housing navigation" and generally does not allow for other uses.
2. More generous funding of shelter management and administration. Currently we receive 10% of HOP grant funds for administration. For Good Sam this is about \$130,000 which supports less than 2 full time positions and no overhead costs. Despite the relentless demands of managing a shelter, we must find time to raise a significant amount of private funds annually for executive management, financial management, human resources, and fundraising staff.
3. More focus on building capacity (proper scale, sufficient skills and competent management) of the shelter system similar to what VHCB does with its housing development organizations. We appreciate the dedication of the OEO staff but as we experience the program its main focus is on monitoring and compliance. More focus is needed on building and sustaining effective shelter organizations.

As you look at the response to homelessness in next year's budget, please consider a significant increase in HOP funding to give the shelter system the funding it needs to do its job safely and well. This is one of several reasons why we support the "Bridges to Housing" proposal submitted by the Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness. It recommends an additional \$20 million in supplemental funding FY24 to the Office of Economic Opportunity for funding for the Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP).

Thank you for your consideration.

Rick DeAngelis and Julie Bond
Co-Executive Directors
Good Samaritan Haven