

1 H.91

2 An act relating to the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
3 Responsive Transition to Housing Program

4 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

5 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

6 The General Assembly finds that:

7 (1) according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
8 Development's 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, Vermont had
9 the fourth highest rate of homelessness in 2024 in that 53 of every 10,000
10 Vermonters are experiencing homelessness, with only Hawaii, New York, and
11 Oregon experiencing higher rates;

12 (2) according to the Vermont Homeless Management Information
13 System, as of March 2025 there were 4,971 individuals who were homeless in
14 the State, 1,105 of whom were children;

15 (3) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, there were
16 approximately 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont, which represents a 300
17 percent increase over the 1,110 unhoused individuals prior to the COVID-19
18 pandemic in 2020;

19 (4) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, over 35
20 percent of those Vermonters experiencing homelessness were unhoused for
21 more than one year and over 72 percent were unhoused for more than 90 days;

- 1 (5) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, Black
2 Vermonters are 5.6 times more likely to be unhoused as compared to white
3 Vermonters;
- 4 (6) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that 36,000
5 primary homes are needed in Vermont between 2025–2029, 3,295 of which are
6 needed to address homelessness;
- 7 (7) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that “[h]alf of
8 all Vermont renters are cost-burdened, and one-in-four pay more than 50
9 [percent] of their income on housing costs, putting them at high risk of
10 eviction,” which “is heightened by Vermont’s rental vacancy rate of 3
11 [percent], which is well below the 5 [percent] rate of a healthy market”;
- 12 (8) since 2020, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board has
13 facilitated construction of 170 new single-family homeownership units and 269
14 new shelter beds; and
- 15 (9) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that “[h]alf of
16 all Vermont renters are cost-burdened, and one-in-four pay more than 50
17 [percent] of their income on housing costs, putting them at high risk of
18 eviction,” which “is heightened by Vermont’s rental vacancy rate of 3
19 [percent], which is well below the 5 [percent] rate of a healthy market”.

1 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

2 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that unsheltered homelessness
3 be eliminated and that homelessness in Vermont be rare, brief, and
4 nonrecurring.

5 (b) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Vermont Homeless
6 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
7 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is a step toward ensuring that:

8 (1) homelessness be reduced in Vermont and interim shelter
9 opportunities be available to provide a stable pathway to permanent housing
10 for all Vermonters experiencing homelessness, including safe shelter options
11 for individuals living in unsheltered homelessness;

12 (2) Vermont increase the supply of emergency shelter as well as
13 permanent supportive housing that meets the specific needs of individuals;

14 (3) community components of all shelter types are integrated in a
15 systemic manner;

16 (4) night-by-night shelter, relocation between interim shelter sites, and
17 other disruptions in housing stability be eliminated to the extent possible;

18 (5) Vermont's emergency housing statutes, rules, policies, procedures,
19 and practices be modeled on Housing First principles where appropriate;

20 (6) noncongregate shelter be used to the extent possible; and

1 (7) Vermont reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel
2 rooms to shelter participating households and expand the use of emergency
3 shelters throughout the State for this purpose.

4 (c) It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

5 (1) the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
6 Transition to Housing Program established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 replaces
7 the provision of emergency housing through the General Assistance Program
8 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 21 and the Housing Opportunity Grant
9 Program beginning in fiscal year 2027 and on an ongoing basis; and

10 (2) in fiscal years 2027 and 2028, emergency shelter services funded
11 through the Housing Opportunity Grant Program in fiscal year 2025 be funded
12 at a level equivalent to or greater than fiscal year 2025 expenditures.

13 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
14 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2025 * * *

15 Sec. 3. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is added to read:

16 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
17 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

18 § 2201. SHORT TITLE

19 The Program established in this chapter may be cited as “VHEARTH” or
20 the “VHEARTH Program.”

1 § 2202. PURPOSE

2 It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

3 (1) replace the provision of emergency housing through the General
4 Assistance Program established in chapter 21 of this title and the Housing
5 Opportunity Grant Program and use funds and resources previously attributed
6 to these programs, and any other identified State and federal monies, to fund
7 the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
8 Housing Program established in this chapter;

9 (2) reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel rooms to
10 shelter participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters
11 throughout the State for this purpose; and

12 (3) assist in maintaining housing for households at risk of homelessness
13 and transition households experiencing homelessness to permanent housing.

14 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

15 As used in this chapter:

16 (1) “At risk of homelessness” means precariously housed without
17 sufficient income, resources, or support to prevent homelessness.

18 (2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant
19 to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59.

20 (3) “Community-based shelter” means a shelter that meets the
21 Department’s standards for the operation of shelters.

1 (4) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

2 (5) “Extreme weather event” means extreme hot or cold temperatures or
3 weather events, such as hurricanes, flooding, or blizzards, that create
4 hazardous conditions for outdoor habitation by humans.

5 (6) “Homeless” means:

6 (A) lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

7 (B) facing imminent loss of primary nighttime residence;

8 (C) fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence; or

9 (D) otherwise defined as homeless under federal law.

10 (7) “Household” means an individual and any dependents for whom the
11 individual is legally responsible who are domiciled and intend to stay in
12 Vermont as evidenced by an intent to dwell in Vermont and to return to
13 Vermont if temporarily absent, coupled with an act or acts consistent with that
14 intent. “Household” includes individuals who reside together as one economic
15 unit, including those who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

16 (8) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not
17 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation.

18 § 2204. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

19 (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory
20 council composed of individuals and organizations in the community action
21 agency’s region. The membership of each regional advisory council shall

1 reflect, to the extent possible, the growing diversity among Vermonters,
2 including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well
3 as with regards to socioeconomic status, geographic location, gender, sexual
4 identity, and disability status.

5 (1) Members of an advisory council shall include individuals with lived
6 experience of homelessness, local housing coalitions or a local continuum of
7 care serving as a local housing coalition, other organizations providing services
8 in the region, municipalities, statewide homelessness organizations, the
9 Agency of Human Services' Field Services Director, and any other
10 representatives of the Agency as needed.

11 (2) Members of a regional advisory council may include community and
12 State partners, housing providers, providers of coordinated entry, continuums
13 of care, faith-based organizations, and other individuals or organizations as
14 needed.

15 (b) Each regional advisory council shall provide advice and
16 recommendations to the community action agency in its region regarding the
17 design and implementation of the Program.

18 (c) Each regional advisory council shall meet on at least a quarterly basis.

19 (d) Members of a regional advisory council who are not participating in
20 their professional capacity shall be entitled to per diem compensation and
21 reimbursement of expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more

1 than eight meetings annually. These payments shall be made from monies
2 distributed to the relevant community action agency by the Department.

3 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
4 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2026 * * *

5 Sec. 4. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is amended to read:

6 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
7 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

8 * * *

9 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

10 As used in this chapter:

11 * * *

12 (2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant
13 to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 or the entity or entities otherwise authorized by the
14 Department pursuant to section 2205 of this chapter to fulfill the duties of a
15 community action agency under this chapter.

16 * * *

17 § 2204. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY
18 ASSISTANCE AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING
19 PROGRAM

20 The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition
21 to Housing Program is established in the Department to provide services to

1 households that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, to the extent
2 funds exist.

3 (1) The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a
4 statewide organization that has population-specific service experience to
5 provide or cause to be provided supportive services and shelter to those
6 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
7 violence.

8 (2) All other participating households shall be served by or through a
9 community action agency responsible for a geographically distinct region of
10 the State. Community action agencies participating in the Program shall
11 provide or cause to be provided supportive services, extreme weather event
12 shelter, and emergency shelter.

13 § 2205. AUTHORIZATION PROCESS; REAUTHORIZATION REVIEW

14 (a) The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a
15 statewide organization to provide or cause to be provided supportive services
16 and shelter to those households that are experiencing or that have experienced
17 domestic or sexual violence. The Department shall conduct regular reviews of
18 the statewide organization to ensure compliance with this chapter. The
19 statewide organization may be subject to corrective actions by the Department
20 if, within the constraint of appropriated resources, it no longer meets the
21 requirements of this chapter or has failed to adequately meet the needs of

1 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
2 violence. If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities under
3 this chapter, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that there
4 is not a gap in services.

5 (b)(1) The Department shall authorize a community action agency to serve
6 or cause to be served households that are homeless or at risk of becoming
7 homeless in a geographically distinct region of the State if it meets the criteria
8 in this section. If a community action agency cannot fulfill its responsibilities
9 under this chapter, the Department shall work with other community action
10 agencies or other appropriate community entities to ensure that there is not a
11 gap in services in a community action agency's region.

12 (2) A community action agency providing or causing to provide services
13 in accordance with this chapter shall have:

14 (A) existing or planned infrastructure to support households in the
15 region, including an established leadership team, a human resources staff, and
16 the ability to receive grant funding and issue subgrants;

17 (B) the ability to meet the Department's reporting requirements,
18 including having a past history of reporting compliance;

19 (C) the capacity to perform or cause to be performed the core
20 services required pursuant to section 2206 of this chapter;

1 (D) the capacity to seek and accept charitable contributions, grants,
2 and services of volunteers, including money, clothing, and furniture;

3 (E) any outcome measures established in this chapter;

4 (F) community connections with other providers in the region,
5 including local housing coalitions, housing providers, providers of coordinated
6 entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and providers of services
7 to individuals who are older Vermonters; individuals who have disabilities, a
8 substance use disorder, or a mental health condition; individuals reentering the
9 community after incarceration; individuals transitioning from the care and
10 custody of the Commissioner for Children and Families; and families with
11 children; and

12 (G) the ability to provide plain language communications to
13 households receiving services.

14 (3) Not less than every three years, the Department shall conduct a
15 reauthorization review of each community action agency providing or causing
16 to provide services pursuant to this chapter. An organization may be subject to
17 corrective actions by the Department if, within the constraint of appropriated
18 resources, it no longer meets the requirements in subdivision (2) of this
19 subsection or has failed to adequately meet the needs of households in its
20 region that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Lack of compliance may
21 result in the Department deciding not to reauthorize the community action

1 agency. The Department may review progress of any previously required
2 corrective actions and may review community action agency performance
3 between reauthorization reviews.

4 § 2206. VHEARTH CORE SERVICES

5 (a) The Department shall enter into an agreement with a statewide
6 organization with population-specific experience serving households that are
7 experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence. The
8 organization shall provide or cause to be provided various shelter and case
9 management services that support households.

10 (b) Each community action agency shall offer or cause to be offered, in
11 collaboration with community partners, each of the following services within
12 its region:

13 (1) supportive services, including:

14 (A) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness,
15 which shall include regional intake shelters unless the Department and
16 community action agencies agree otherwise;

17 (B) household needs assessments;

18 (C) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

19 (D) housing navigation services;

20 (E) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
21 assistance;

1 (F) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

2 (G) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the
3 household's housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported
4 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability
5 and independent living advocacy, and referral to health care assistance such as
6 treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorder as provided
7 by the designated and specialized services agencies and preferred providers,
8 respectively, or other providers; and

9 (H) progress monitoring and interventions;

10 (2) the operation of extreme weather event shelters, which may include
11 time-limited congregate accommodations and may be provided through
12 agreements with municipalities or other entities, utilizing available data and
13 considering geographic access to prioritize funding for this purpose; and

14 (3) the operation of emergency shelters in a manner that builds upon the
15 federally required community planning process and prioritizes households in
16 need of the services of an emergency shelter, which may include community-
17 based shelters, temporary use of hotels or motels, lease agreements for full or
18 partial use of an existing building, need-specific shelter arrangements, master
19 grant leases, the development of shelter capacity, or other arrangements or
20 combinations of arrangements that comply with the intent of this chapter.

1 § 2207. USE OF HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

2 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel
3 and motel rooms for emergency housing. Annually, as shelter capacity
4 increases and the number of households experiencing homelessness decreases
5 in each region of the State, the use of hotel and motel rooms for emergency
6 housing in that region shall decrease. Annually, as part of the Department's
7 budget presentation, the Department shall set goals for increased housing
8 capacity, including permanent supportive housing, permanent affordable
9 housing, and shelter beds, some of which may be population-specific, in
10 addition to proposed corresponding decreases in the use of hotel and motel
11 rooms. The Department shall provide data pertaining to the percentage of
12 increased shelter capacity from the previous fiscal year in each region and how
13 that increase impacts the corresponding hotel and motel room usage for
14 emergency housing in each region pursuant to this subsection for the purpose
15 of informing regional planning and expectations.

16 (b) If hotels and motels are used to provide emergency shelter pursuant to
17 this chapter, the hotel and motel operators shall comply with Program rules and
18 the following rules:

19 (1) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule (CVR
20 13-140-023); and

1 (2) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety
2 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

3 (c) Annually, the Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of
4 its budget presentation for approval by the General Assembly. A community
5 action agency shall not pay or cause to be paid with State monies a per-room,
6 per-night basis that exceeds the rate approved by the General Assembly.

7 (d) If a hotel or motel is being utilized, a community action agency or
8 entity under contract with a community action agency:

9 (1) shall ensure relevant support services established pursuant to
10 subdivision 2206(b)(1) of this chapter;

11 (2) shall enter into agreements for the use of blocks of hotel and motel
12 rooms and negotiate the conditions of use for those blocks, including access for
13 providers of case management or other supportive services;

14 (3) shall prioritize the use of hotel and motel room agreements over
15 individual per-room, per-night hotel or motel room use, unless it is not
16 appropriate to a household's needs;

17 (4) may use population-specific placements to the extent certain
18 populations are not isolated from the wider community served through the
19 Program; and

1 (5) shall not utilize hotels and motels outside the community action
2 agency or entity's region, unless approved by the Department or in a written
3 memorandum of understanding between community action agencies.

4 § 2208. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

5 (a) The Department and the Agency of Human Services shall have
6 statewide responsibility for meeting the intent of this chapter, including
7 statewide planning, system development, and the involvement of all the
8 Agency's departments.

9 (b) For the purpose of providing administrative oversight and monitoring of
10 the Program established in this chapter, the Department shall:

11 (1)(A) maintain guidance regarding when extreme weather event
12 shelters shall be operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions;
13 and

14 (B) maintain a website with the locations of all extreme weather
15 event shelters;

16 (2) include as part of any review of a community action agency required
17 pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 the community action agency's ability to
18 perform the requirements of this chapter;

19 (3)(A) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
20 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
21 domestic or sexual violence to develop appropriate resource allocations and

1 methods for adjustment that take into account available data, the presence of
2 community-based providers, and customary resource allocation methods,
3 economic indicators, rate of homelessness, rental vacancy rates, and other
4 variables, as appropriate; and

5 (B) annually, distribute funding to each community action agency
6 and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that
7 have experienced domestic or sexual violence using the allocation formula
8 developed pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (b)(3), or if the
9 Department and community action agencies agree, disperse a joint allocation
10 for all community action agencies, which the community action agencies shall
11 determine how to distribute amongst themselves;

12 (4) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
13 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
14 domestic and sexual violence to develop appropriate measures and methods for
15 accountability of the community action agencies' and the statewide
16 organization's execution of duties under this chapter, including the provision
17 of any previously agreed upon information to enable the Department to
18 evaluate the services provided through grant funds, the effect on households
19 receiving services, and an accounting of expended grant funds;

20 (5) provide support and technical assistance to the community action
21 agencies, other community partners, and the statewide organization serving

1 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
2 violence;

3 (6) identify specific administrative resources that could be transitioned
4 to community operations;

5 (7) develop and maintain standards for the core services listed in section
6 2206 of this chapter, including the operation of community-based shelters; and

7 (8) adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25, in consultation with the
8 community action agencies and the statewide organization serving households
9 that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence, as
10 appropriate, for the implementation of this chapter, including rules that address
11 reauthorization standards under subsection 2205(a) and subdivision 2205(b)(3)
12 of this chapter and accommodations for individuals with a disability.

13 § 2209. REGIONAL PLANNING; NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

14 (a) As part of the plan required every three years pursuant to 3 V.S.A.
15 § 3904 and the federally required planning and needs assessments for the
16 continuum of care, the community action agencies shall develop a regional
17 needs assessment and planning process, in collaboration with community and
18 State partners, for use in each community action agency's region to inform
19 future plans addressing housing and homelessness in each region of the State.
20 The regional needs assessment and planning process plans shall include:

1 (1) addressing progress in reducing the number of households
2 experiencing homelessness in a region;

3 (2) assessing the rate households placed in permanent housing return to
4 homelessness and the underlying reasons;

5 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
6 homelessness and efforts to improve the equitable distribution of these
7 resources in the region;

8 (4) reporting the rate of household participation with coordinated entry
9 processes and case management services;

10 (5) identifying system gaps and the funding needed to address those
11 gaps, including periodic inflationary adjustments; and

12 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont's Point-in-Time Count,
13 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

14 (b) Every three years, each community action agency shall submit plans
15 developed pursuant to this section to the Department in a format prescribed by
16 the Department and to the regional planning committees in the region. Upon
17 receipt of the plans, the Department shall consolidate the results of these
18 reports and submit the consolidated report to the House Committee on Human
19 Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare.

1 § 2210. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

2 On or before the last day of every third month, the Department shall post a
3 report on its website, in consultation with the community action agencies and
4 the statewide organization serving households experiencing domestic or sexual
5 violence, addressing:

6 (1) the number of households served through the Program, by household
7 size and, if applicable, by eligibility category, region, service provider, and
8 core service category;

9 (2) cash income and noncash benefits by source;

10 (3) changes in capacity for shelter beds, nursing homes, and residential
11 care homes since the previous reporting period;

12 (4) the number of diversions from homelessness made during the
13 previous reporting period;

14 (5) the number of households whose intake assessment indicated a
15 potential need for services from each department within the Agency;

16 (6) the number of households that have been successfully transitioned to
17 permanent housing since the previous reporting period, the types of housing
18 settings in which they have been placed, and any supportive services they are
19 receiving in conjunction with their housing;

20 (7) the number of households returning to homelessness after placement
21 in permanent housing; and

§ ~~2204~~ 2211. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

* * * Implementation Planning and Initial Regional Assessments * * *

(a) On or before October 1, 2025, the Department for Children and Families, in collaboration with the community action agencies and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence, shall submit the first of two written implementation plans to the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee outlining its initial plans for the implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the first implementation plan shall include:

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1 assessments and develop future regional plans, including consideration of
2 municipal needs;

3 (2) recommended performance measures to evaluate the community
4 action agencies and the statewide organization serving households that are
5 experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence in carrying
6 out their duties under 33 V.S.A. chapter 22, including:

7 (A) the provision of any previously agreed upon information to
8 enable the Department to evaluate the services provided through grant funds,
9 the effect on households receiving services, and an accounting of expended
10 grant funds; and

11 (B) performance measures that may be specific to an individual
12 region of the State or provider;

13 (3) recommended eligibility for each of the core services listed in 33
14 V.S.A. § 2206;

15 (4) guidance regarding when extreme weather event shelters shall be
16 operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions;

17 (5) a timeline for the implementation of core services listed in 33 V.S.A.
18 § 2206 for the first six months of fiscal year 2027;

19 (6) recommended intake and assessment processes to determine
20 appropriate shelter and services for households based on Program eligibility;
21 and

1 (7) a recommended process to enable an unwilling community action
2 agency to opt-out of participation in the Program in a manner that gives the
3 State adequate notice.

4 (b) On or before January 15, 2026, the Department for Children and
5 Families, in collaboration with the community action agencies, regional
6 advisory councils established pursuant to 33 V.S.A. § 2204, any other relevant
7 department of the Agency, and the statewide organization serving households
8 that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence,
9 shall submit the second of two written implementation plans to the House
10 Committee on Human Services and the Senate Committee on Health and
11 Welfare outlining its initial plans for the implementation of the Vermont
12 Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing
13 Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 on or before July 1, 2026.
14 Specifically, the second implementation plan shall include recommendations
15 and information on the following:

16 (1)(A) funding allocations among the community action agencies and
17 other providers, including for services specific to households that are
18 experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence; and

19 (B) the distribution of fiscal year 2026 appropriations pursuant to
20 Sec. 8 of this act;

1 (2) additional State and federal funding and other resources identified
2 for the Program;

3 (3) establishing an appeals process that includes a hearing before the
4 Human Services Board and an option for an expedited appeals process;

5 (4) the role of 211 within the intake system;

6 (5) whether access to all or some services should include an expectation
7 regarding household participation in case management services or other
8 expectations such as night limits on the use of hotels and motels, and, if so,
9 what elements and in what circumstances participation in case management
10 services or other expectations should be applied;

11 (6) whether the use of emergency shelter should include financial
12 participation, and, if so, what that participation should include;

13 (7) appropriate intake and assessment processes for verification of
14 residency, homelessness, and household income;

15 (8) how to best ensure that there is equitable access to shelter and
16 supportive services for households experiencing homelessness;

17 (9) the number of housing vouchers that Vermont lost in the past year, if
18 the data is available; and

19 (10) any anticipated challenges requiring a legislative solution.

1 Sec. 6. INTERIM AND FINAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT PLANS

2 Prior to the enactment of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
3 Responsive Transition to Housing Program on July 1, 2026, the statewide
4 organization serving households experiencing or that have experienced
5 domestic or sexual violence and community action agencies shall conduct
6 initial needs assessments in accordance with the process developed in Sec.
7 5(a)(1) of this act. On or before January 15, 2026, the community action
8 agencies shall submit one comprehensive progress report and the statewide
9 organization shall submit a separate report to the House Committees on
10 Appropriations and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on
11 Appropriations and on Health and Welfare, including estimated fiscal year
12 2027 budget proposals, estimated costs of administering the Program, and an
13 analysis of any barriers to generating additional shelter and permanent housing
14 in the region. On or before April 1, 2026, the statewide organization shall
15 submit a report and the community action agencies shall submit a separate
16 comprehensive report detailing the results of each region's needs assessment
17 and implementation plans, which shall not exceed the budgetary proposals
18 provided in the January 15, 2026 progress report, to the House Committees on
19 Appropriations and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on
20 Appropriations and on Health and Welfare and to the regional planning

1 committees in the region. The initial needs assessment conducted pursuant to
2 this section shall include:

3 (1) addressing progress in reducing the number of households
4 experiencing homelessness in a region;

5 (2) assessing the rate households placed in permanent housing return to
6 homelessness and the underlying reasons;

7 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
8 homelessness and efforts to improve the equitable distribution of these
9 resources in the region;

10 (4) reporting the rate of household participation with coordinated entry
11 processes and case management services;

12 (5) identifying system gaps and the funding needed to address those
13 gaps, including periodic inflationary adjustments; and

14 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont's Point-in-Time Count,
15 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

16 * * * Community Action Agencies * * *

17 Sec. 7. 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 is amended to read:

18 CHAPTER 59. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES

19 § 3901. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

20 (a) Recognizing that the economic well-being and social equity of every
21 Vermonter has long been a fundamental concern of the State, it remains

1 evident that ~~poverty continues to be the lot of~~ a substantial number of
2 Vermont's population continues to experience poverty. It is the policy of ~~this~~
3 the State to help develop the full potential of each of its citizens so they can
4 contribute to the fullest extent possible to the life of our communities and the
5 State as a whole.

6 (b) It is the purpose of this chapter to strengthen, supplement, and
7 coordinate efforts that further this policy through:

8 (1) the strengthening of community capabilities for planning,
9 coordinating, and managing federal, State, and other sources of assistance
10 related to the problem of poverty;

11 (2) the better organization and utilization of a range of services related
12 to the needs of ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income; and

13 (3) the broadening of the resource base of programs to secure a more
14 active role in assisting ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income from business,
15 labor, and other groups from the private sector.

16 § 3902. OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

17 (a) The Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity is hereby
18 authorized to allocate available financial assistance for community ~~services~~
19 action agencies and programs in accordance with State and federal law and
20 regulation.

1 (b) The Director may provide financial assistance to community ~~services~~
2 action agencies for the planning, conduct, administration, and evaluation of
3 community ~~service~~ action programs to provide a range of services and
4 activities having a measurable and potentially major impact on causes of
5 poverty in the community or in areas of the community where poverty is a
6 particularly acute problem. Components of those services and activities may
7 involve, without limitation of other activities and supporting facilities designed
8 to assist ~~low-income~~ participants with low income:

- 9 (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;
- 10 (2) to obtain adequate education;
- 11 (3) to make better use of available income;
- 12 (4) to ~~provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living~~
13 ~~environment~~ have access to safe, secure, and permanent housing;
- 14 (5) to obtain prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery services
15 ~~for the prevention of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and for the rehabilitation~~
16 ~~of narcotic addicts and alcoholics~~ individuals with substance use disorder;
- 17 (6) to obtain emergency assistance through loans and grants to meet
18 immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for
19 health services, nutritious food, housing, and unemployment-related assistance;
- 20 (7) to remove obstacles and solve personal and family problems ~~which~~
21 that block achievement of self-sufficiency;

- 1 (8) to achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community;
- 2 (9) to make more frequent and effective use of other programs related to
- 3 the purposes of this chapter; and
- 4 (10) to coordinate and establish linkages between governmental and
- 5 other social service programs to ~~assure~~ ensure the effective delivery of such
- 6 services to ~~low-income~~ persons; with low income and to encourage the use of
- 7 entities in the private sector of the community in efforts to ameliorate poverty
- 8 in the community.

9 (c) The Director is authorized to adopt rules pursuant to chapter 25 of this

10 title appropriate to the carrying out of this chapter and the purposes thereof.

11 § 3903. DESIGNATION OF AGENCIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND

12 ACTIVITIES TO AMELIORATE OR ELIMINATE POVERTY

13 The Director shall designate private nonprofit ~~community-based~~

14 community-based organizations ~~who that~~ have demonstrated or ~~who that~~ can

15 demonstrate the ability to provide services and activities as defined in

16 subsection 3902(b) of this title as community ~~services~~ action agencies.

17 § 3904. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCY PLAN

18 Each designated community ~~services~~ action agency shall determine the need

19 for activities and services within the area served by the agency and shall

20 thereafter prepare a community services plan ~~which that~~ describes the method

21 by which the agency will provide those services. The plan shall include a

1 schedule for the anticipated provision of new or additional services and shall
2 specify the resources ~~which~~ that are needed by and available to the agency to
3 implement the plan. The community services plan shall be completed every
4 three years and updated annually. The plan shall include the regional needs
5 assessment required under 33 V.S.A. § 2209.

6 § 3905. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES;

7 ADMINISTRATION

8 (a) Each community ~~services~~ action agency shall administer its programs as
9 set out in the community services plan and as approved by its board of
10 directors.

11 (b) Each board of a nonprofit ~~community-based~~ community-based
12 organization that is designated a community ~~services~~ action agency under
13 section 3903 of this chapter shall have an executive committee of not more
14 than seven members who shall be representative of the composition of the
15 board and the board shall be so constituted that:

16 * * *

17 (2) one-third of the members of the board are persons chosen in
18 accordance with election procedures adequate to ~~assure~~ ensure that they are
19 representative of ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income in the area served; and

(c) Each member of ~~the~~ a board selected to represent a specific geographic area within a community shall reside in the area ~~he or she~~ the member represents. ~~No person selected under subdivisions (2) or (3) of subsection (b) as a member of a board shall serve on such board for more than five consecutive years, or more than a total of 10 years~~ Each board shall adopt term limits to govern its members.

Sec. 8. APPROPRIATION; TRANSITION PLANNING

(2) \$400,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for distribution to the statewide organization serving households experiencing or who have experienced domestic or sexual violence; and

1 (3) \$515,000.00 to the Department of Health for distribution to Bridges
2 to Health for services to individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at
3 risk of becoming homeless;

4 (4) \$1,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for the
5 distribution of grants to municipalities planning and implementing services for
6 households that are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness, in
7 collaboration with the community action agency serving a municipality's
8 region.

9 (b) The Department shall report on the distribution of appropriations made
10 in this section pursuant to Sec. 5(b)(1)(B) of this act.

11 * * * VHEARTH Transition * * *

12 Sec. 9. VHEARTH TRANSITION

13 Between July 1, 2025 and July 1, 2026, pursuant to a mutual agreement
14 between the Department and a community action agency or the statewide
15 organization serving households experiencing domestic or sexual violence,
16 specific elements of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
17 Responsive Transition to Housing Program may take effect prior to July 1,
18 2026 subject to:

19 (1) 30-day notice to affected households;

20 (2) 30-day notice to the Joint Fiscal Committee, House Committee on
21 Human Services, and Senate Committee on Health and Welfare; and

1 (3) posted notice on the Department's website.

2 * * * Effective Dates * * *

3 Sec. 10. EFFECTIVE DATES

4 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, except that:

5 (1) Sec. 4 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive

6 Transition to Housing Program) shall take effect on July 1, 2026; however,

7 specific elements of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and

8 Responsive Transition to Housing Program may be implemented prior to that

9 date pursuant to Sec. 9;

10 (2) Sec. 7 (community action agencies) shall take effect on July 1, 2026;

11 and

12 (3) the Department for Children and Families shall commence the

13 rulemaking process prior to July 1, 2026 in order to have rules in place on that

14 date.