

1 H.594  
2 Introduced by Representatives Maguire of Rutland City and Wood of  
3 Waterbury  
4 Referred to Committee on  
5 Date:  
6 Subject: Human services; Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability  
7 Program; Return Home Program  
8 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish the  
9 Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program and the Return  
10 Home Program in fiscal years 2027 and 2028.

11 An act relating to establishing the Temporary Emergency Housing and  
12 Accountability Program and the Return Home Program in fiscal years 2027  
13 and 2028  
14 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:  
15 Sec. 1. PURPOSE  
16 It is the purpose of this act to:  
17 (1) ensure that narrowly tailored, temporary emergency housing  
18 assistance is available to only the most vulnerable Vermonters in crisis through  
19 fiscal year 2028 in a manner that encourages efficient and accountable use of  
20 taxpayer funds;

- 1        (2) establish clear eligibility criteria, accountability measures, and case
- 2        management requirements;
- 3        (3) transition from reliance on hotels and motels toward sustainable,
- 4        permanent housing solutions, including recovery housing, transitional housing,
- 5        and the Vermont Housing Investment Program (VHIP);
- 6        (4) establish a tiered continuum of care;
- 7        (5) expand the use of alternative emergency housing models in
- 8        partnership with municipalities, nonprofit community-based providers, and
- 9        private landlords;
- 10        (6) integrate supportive services to assist households to achieve
- 11        permanent housing stability;
- 12        (7) establish transparent accountability measures, reporting
- 13        requirements, and oversight mechanisms;
- 14        (8) support self-sufficiency among Program participants by requiring
- 15        personal responsibility and active participation in housing searches;
- 16        (9) empower local communities to administer emergency housing
- 17        programs with maximum flexibility; and
- 18        (10) create a diversified system of emergency housing options, such as
- 19        shelters, transitional housing, recovery residences, shared housing
- 20        arrangements, host-home models, master-leased units, and rapid rehousing

1 placements, that provide cost-effective, sustainable, and supportive outcomes  
2 to Program participants.

3 Sec. 2. DEFINITIONS

4 As used in this act:

5 (1) “Administering agency” means the department, office, or designated  
6 entity responsible for implementing and overseeing the provisions of this act.

7 (2) “Alternative housing options” means housing options such as  
8 shelters, transitional housing, recovery residences, shared housing  
9 arrangements, host-home models, master-leased units, and rapid rehousing  
10 placements.

11 (3) “Applicant” means an individual or household that applies for  
12 emergency housing assistance under this act.

13 (4) “Case management services” means individualized supports  
14 connecting households to public benefits, health care, employment, and  
15 permanent housing.

16 (5) “Cold-weather emergency shelter” means publicly funded shelter  
17 beds made available to individuals during periods when temperatures or  
18 weather conditions pose a risk to health and safety.

19 (6) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

20 (7) “Disability” means a physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental, or  
21 mental health condition that substantially limits one or more major life

1       activities, or that requires ongoing support, accommodation, or treatment to  
2       maintain an individual's health, safety, or independence. The term includes  
3       chronic or episodic conditions that significantly impact daily functioning,  
4       regardless of whether the individual is receiving, or is eligible to receive,  
5       federal disability benefits.

6           (8) "Eligible individual" or "eligible household" means an individual or  
7       group of individuals, respectively, without a fixed nighttime residence or at  
8       immediate risk of losing housing within seven days, as verified by an  
9       administering agency.

10           (9) "Emergency housing" means temporary shelter, lodging, or other  
11       housing support provided to eligible individuals or eligible households when  
12       no safe alternative housing option is immediately available.

13           (10) "Emergency housing assistance" means the provision of shelter,  
14       temporary accommodations, or related services necessary to protect the health,  
15       safety, and welfare of eligible individuals and eligible households.

16           (11) "Homeless" means lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime  
17       residence, including individuals and households that:

18                (A) reside in places not meant for human habitation, such as cars,  
19       parks, abandoned buildings, or streets;

1                   (B) reside in emergency shelters or temporary housing;

2                   (C) are exiting an institution where they temporarily resided and have

3                   no permanent housing to return to; or

4                   (D) are at imminent risk of losing their primary nighttime residence,

5                   as determined by the administering agency.

6                   (12) “Household” means an individual or group of individuals, with or

7                   without children, who present together for emergency housing assistance and

8                   who identify as a unit for purposes of obtaining shelter or housing.

9                   (13) “Minor child” means an individual under 18 years of age.

10                   (14) “Program” means the Temporary Emergency Housing and

11                   Accountability Program.

12                   (15) “Recovery housing” means sober, supportive housing specifically

13                   designed for individuals in recovery from substance use disorder.

14                   (16) “Survivor of domestic violence” means an individual who has

15                   experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking

16                   and who is seeking emergency housing to avoid further harm or abuse.

17                   (17) “Transitional housing” means time-limited housing with services

18                   designed to support residents in achieving permanent housing stability.

1 Sec. 3. TEMPORARY EMERGENCY HOUSING AND  
2 ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAM

3 (a) Program established. In fiscal years 2027 and 2028, there is established  
4 the Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program, administered  
5 by the Department for Children and Families' Economic Services Division, for  
6 the purposes of:

7       (1) providing temporary emergency housing to eligible individuals and  
8 eligible households experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of  
9 homelessness;

10       (2) reducing reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing  
11 assistance;

12       (3) expanding the use of alternative housing options in partnership with  
13 community organizations, municipalities, and private landlords;

14       (4) integrating case management and individualized housing plans into  
15 all emergency housing placements; and

16       (5) ensuring accountability, transparency, and cost efficiency in the use  
17 of public funds.

18       (b) Tiered continuum of care. The Department shall implement a tiered  
19 continuum of care framework to serve individuals and families experiencing  
20 homelessness, including those receiving emergency housing assistance

1 pursuant to this act. The continuum of care shall consist of the following tiers,  
2 listed in order of priority and progression:

3 (1) Tier 1: high-barrier shelter first option.

4 (A) High-barrier shelters shall serve as the preferred initial placement  
5 for eligible individuals and eligible households where capacity, staffing, and  
6 geographic accessibility are available. High-barrier shelters shall provide  
7 structured rules, mandatory participation in case management, and Program  
8 accountability measures.

9 (B) Individuals placed in a high-barrier shelter shall have the ability  
10 to participate in structured programming, including mandatory case  
11 management, housing stability planning, and employment, education, or  
12 treatment services, as appropriate, and have the physical and behavioral ability  
13 to comply with Program expectations.

14 (C) Hotels and motels shall only be used for temporary overflow  
15 during periods of shelter capacity shortage, subject to the limitation in Sec. 8 of  
16 this act.

17 (2) Tier 1A: low-barrier shelter option.

18 (A) Low-barrier shelters shall serve eligible individuals or eligible  
19 households unable or unwilling to participate immediately in high-barrier  
20 shelters.

1                   (B) Low-barrier shelters shall minimize barriers to entry by reducing  
2                   the rules and programmatic requirements used in high-barrier shelters, while  
3                   requiring access to case management and other housing support services.

4                   (C) The Department shall prioritize individuals in a low-barrier  
5                   shelter for transition to a high-barrier shelter or housing as described in  
6                   subdivision (3) of this subsection (b) as soon as feasible.

7                   (3) Tier 2: transitional and recovery housing.

8                   (A) Time-limited housing with structured support services shall  
9                   stabilize and prepare eligible individuals and eligible households for permanent  
10                   housing.

11                   (B) Transitional and recovery housing shall include housing for  
12                   individuals exiting treatment for substance use disorder or with a history of  
13                   substance use disorder.

14                   (4) Tier 2A: permanent and temporary supportive housing.

15                   (A) Temporary or permanent supportive housing programs shall be  
16                   provided to eligible individuals and eligible households requiring ongoing or  
17                   intensive supports to maintain housing stability.

18                   (i) Permanent supportive housing shall provide long-term, non-  
19                   time-limited housing combined with voluntary supportive services for  
20                   individuals with complex needs, including chronic homelessness, serious  
21                   mental illness, or long-term recovery needs.

12                   (5) Tier 3: Vermont Housing Investment Program (VHIP) and  
13                   permanent housing. This tier provides for long-term, stable housing solutions,  
14                   including subsidized units, VHIP-supported units, and repurposed hotels and  
15                   motels, previously used for General Assistance emergency housing, that are  
16                   now converted workforce or transitional housing.

17 (c) Tiered placement requirements.

18                   (1) Eligible individuals and eligible households shall be placed in the  
19                   highest-need tier appropriate to the individual's or household's circumstances,  
20                   with high-barrier shelter as the default placement, except where low-barrier  
21                   shelter is necessary to ensure immediate shelter access.

1                   (2) Movement between tiers shall prioritize progress toward permanent  
2                   housing, minimizing reliance on temporary hotel or motel placements.

3                   (3) An eligible individual or eligible household shall not be denied  
4                   placement, sanctioned, or deemed noncompliant under this section due to the  
5                   unavailability of shelter beds, housing placements, case management services,  
6                   treatment capacity, or other system resources outside the control of the eligible  
7                   individual or household.

8                   (d) Coordination and reporting.

9                   (1) The Department shall coordinate services provided in high-barrier  
10                  shelters, low-barrier shelters, transitional housing programs, VHIP units,  
11                  recovery housing units, and cold-weather shelters to ensure efficient use of  
12                  resources.

13                  (2) Eligible individuals' or eligible households' placement, duration of  
14                  stay, and progression through the tiers established in subsection (b) of this  
15                  section shall be reported pursuant to Sec. 15 of this act.

16                  (e) Prioritization. The tiered continuum of care established in subsection  
17                  (b) of this section shall prioritize eligible individuals and eligible households  
18                  that meet multiple vulnerability criteria, including disability, age, chronic  
19                  homelessness, and domestic violence status.

1 Sec. 4. ELIGIBILITY

2 (a) General eligibility.

3 (1) Eligible individuals and eligible households in the Temporary  
4 Emergency Housing and Accountability Program established in this act shall  
5 be in need of emergency housing assistance and physically present in Vermont  
6 as verified by one or more of the following:

7 (A) a Vermont-issued driver's license or identification card;  
8 (B) a lease or utility bill for a Vermont property or other proof of  
9 presence in the State; or  
10 (C) documentation from a Vermont-based social service provider or  
11 health care provider licensed or certified and practicing in Vermont.

12 (2) Recent Program violations or misconduct shall render an otherwise  
13 eligible individual temporarily ineligible for participation in the Program.

14 (3) The Department shall prioritize services to vulnerable populations,  
15 including individuals with verified disabilities; individuals over 60 years of  
16 age; individuals who are pregnant; parents or guardians caring for minor  
17 children; and survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, or human  
18 trafficking.

19 (4) For nonemergency needs and longer-term supports under the  
20 Program, the Department may consider domicile in and connection to

1       Vermont. However, no individual shall be denied emergency life-safety shelter  
2       solely on the basis of citizenship or immigration status.

3       (b) Verification of residency.

4       (1) Eligibility for emergency housing assistance under the Program shall  
5       be based on an individual's or household's current physical presence in  
6       Vermont and verified need. The Department may consider domicile in and  
7       connection to Vermont for nonemergency needs pursuant to subdivision (a)(4)  
8       of this section, but emergency life-safety shelter shall not be denied solely on  
9       the basis of citizenship or immigration status.

10       (2) For emergency placements, the Department shall accept any  
11       reasonable documentation evidencing identity and presence in the State,  
12       including government-issued identification, administering agency  
13       documentation, or self-attestation corroborated by collateral information when  
14       other documentation is not reasonably available.

15       (3) For nonemergency needs, the Department shall accept reasonable  
16       documentation of domicile in or connection to Vermont in a manner specified  
17       by the Commissioner for Children and Families in rule. Domicile in and  
18       connection to Vermont may be verified for nonemergency supports and  
19       redetermined periodically or when the individual's or household's  
20       circumstances change.

1                   (4) All documentation submitted pursuant to this section shall be subject  
2                   to verification by the Department, in coordination with the Departments of  
3                   Taxes and of Motor Vehicles.

4                   (5) The Department shall permit presumptive eligibility for a period of  
5                   up to 14 days for applicants who attest to meeting the residency requirement  
6                   but lack immediate access to the required documentation, provided that  
7                   documentation is actively pursued during the presumptive eligibility period.

8                   (c) Verification of disability.

9                   (1) Proof of an individual's disability shall be verified by:  
10                   (A) a health care provider licensed or certified and practicing in  
11                   Vermont;

12                   (B) a determination or certification from a State or federally  
13                   recognized agency or program that provides services to individuals with  
14                   disabilities;

15                   (C) documentation from an educational institution, service provider,  
16                   or social service agency in Vermont with knowledge of the individual's  
17                   disability; or

18                   (D) a self-attestation by the individual, subject to verification by the  
19                   administering agency, when other documentation is not reasonably available.

1                   (2) An individual shall not be required to establish eligibility for the  
2                   Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program solely through a  
3                   federal disability benefits determination or award.

4                   (3) The status of an individual with a disability shall be verified during  
5                   the individual's initial application process and redetermined as appropriate, at  
6                   most every 36 months or upon a material change in condition, with flexible  
7                   acceptance of provider notes, benefit statements, or self-attestation  
8                   corroborated by collateral information.

9                   (d) Fraud prevention.

10                  (1) An applicant or Program participant who knowingly provides false,  
11                  misleading, or incomplete information regarding residency, disability status,  
12                  household composition, or other eligibility criteria shall be subject to:

13                  (A) immediate denial or termination of benefits under the Program;  
14                  and

15                  (B) repayment of improperly received benefits, which shall be  
16                  recovered through administrative or civil processes.

17                  (2) The Department may refer cases suspected of fraud to the Office of  
18                  the Attorney General or a State's Attorney for investigation and prosecution  
19                  under applicable State law.

20                  (3) The Department shall provide clear written notice to all applicants  
21                  regarding penalties for fraud at the time of application.

1                   (4) The Department shall not impose a penalty upon an individual or  
2                   household for a good-faith, immaterial error that was corrected upon notice  
3                   within a reasonable time period.

4                   Sec. 5. ACCOUNTABILITY AND CASE MANAGEMENT

5                   (a)(1) A participant in the Program shall be required to:

6                   (A) participate in ongoing case management services with a State-  
7                   contracted case manager;

8                   (B) comply with an individualized housing stability plan, including  
9                   participation in employment, treatment, or housing search activities as  
10                   appropriate; and

11                   (C) abide by Program rules.

12                   (2) The Department and its contractors shall comply with Title II of the  
13                   Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101 et seq. and Section 504 of  
14                   the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794, for the purposes of providing  
15                   reasonable modifications, effective communication, and accessible placements.  
16                   Program rules, case management requirements, and sanctions shall be  
17                   reasonably modified as necessary to avoid discrimination against qualified  
18                   individuals with a disability.

19                   (3) Eligible individuals and eligible households shall have secular  
20                   alternatives to any faith-based or ideological programming. The Department

1       shall not penalize an eligible individual or eligible household for declining  
2       religious activities.

3       (b) An individual shall be ineligible for assistance for 30 days under the  
4       Program, unless extenuating circumstances are documented by the  
5       Department, when the individual knowingly and willfully:

6           (1) fails to check into assigned housing;  
7           (2) refuses to comply with Program commitments, responsibilities, and  
8       obligations;  
9           (3) declines an alternative housing option; or  
10          (4) engages in behavior that the Department identifies as misconduct.

11       (c) Sanctions issued under this section shall not be imposed when the  
12       eligible individual's noncompliance is primarily attributable to cognitive  
13       impairment, active mental health crisis, substance withdrawal, developmental  
14       disability, or other documented condition that materially limits the individual's  
15       ability to comply, unless reasonable accommodations have been offered and  
16       documented.

17       (d) Reapplication after sanction shall require a new eligibility  
18       determination, verification of compliance with housing search requirements,  
19       and participation in relevant services.

20       (e) An individual engaged in criminal activity may be subject to immediate  
21       termination where necessary for the safety of the individual, other Program

1 participants, or Program staff, followed by a prompt post-deprivation hearing  
2 within 10 days following the termination. Otherwise, termination in the  
3 Program shall only occur after the Department provides notice to the eligible  
4 individual including a written decision stating the findings and reasons for the  
5 Department's decision, and an opportunity to be heard.

6 (f) The Department shall allocate funds sufficient to ensure that case  
7 management services are delivered in ratios not to exceed:  
8       (1) one case manager per 25 participants in high-barrier shelter  
9       placements; and

10       (2) one case manager per 35 participants in low-barrier, transitional, or  
11       supportive housing placements.

12       (g) As used in this section, "misconduct" means enumerated behaviors that  
13       materially endanger the safety of others, involve the destruction of property, or  
14       constitute repeated refusals of suitable placements following a documented  
15       suitability assessment and reasonable accommodations.

16 Sec. 6. TIME LIMITS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

17       (a) Assistance under the Program shall be time-limited by tier as follows:  
18           (1) Tier 1 and tier 1A placements shall not exceed 60 days.  
19           (2) Tier 2 and tier 2A placements shall not exceed 180 days.

20       (b) Time limits shall be tolled during periods in which an eligible  
21       individual or eligible household is actively awaiting placement in housing,

1        treatment, or services for which the eligible individual or eligible household is  
2        otherwise eligible.

3        (c) The Department may grant hardship extensions pursuant to criteria  
4        adopted by the Commissioner in rule, including for medical necessity, lack of  
5        reasonable accessible alternative placement, family-unity needs, imminent  
6        severe weather, or imminent risk to health or safety, subject to written findings.  
7        Where a denial of services or termination of services would likely result in  
8        imminent risk to health or safety, the Department shall provide temporary  
9        placement pending appeal or alternative accommodation.

10      Sec. 7. RIGHT TO FAIR HEARING

11      (a) Right to hearing. An applicant for, or participant in, the Program  
12      established pursuant to this act shall have the right to a fair hearing before the  
13      Human Services Board pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 3091 when:  
14      (1) an application for assistance under the Program is denied in whole or  
15      in part;  
16      (2) a participant's benefits are terminated, reduced, or suspended; or  
17      (3) the applicant or participant believes that benefits have not been  
18      provided in accordance with applicable laws, rules, or policies.  
19      (b) Notice. Written notice shall be provided to any applicant or participant  
20      whose participation in the Program is denied, reduced, suspended, or  
21      terminated. Notice shall include:

1                   (1) the specific factual and legal basis for the Department's decision;

2                   (2) the effective date of the action;

3                   (3) a statement of the right to request a fair hearing pursuant to this  
4                   section; and

5                   (4) clear instructions on the process and deadlines for filing an appeal.

6                   (c) Timeliness of appeals. An individual shall file a request for a fair  
7                   hearing with the Human Services Board within 90 days following the date of  
8                   the individual's receipt of the Department's written notice.

9                   (d) Continuation of benefits. If an individual files a request for a fair  
10                   hearing within 10 days after receiving the Department's notice of termination  
11                   of services under the Program, the Department shall continue to provide  
12                   services under the Program without interruption until a decision is issued by  
13                   the Human Services Board, unless the participant voluntarily waives continued  
14                   benefits.

15                   (e) Due process protections. Hearings shall be conducted in accordance  
16                   with due process standards, including the right to present evidence, cross-  
17                   examine witnesses, and be represented by counsel or another authorized  
18                   representative.

19                   (f) Decision. The Human Services Board shall issue a written decision that  
20                   sets forth findings of fact, conclusions of law, and the basis for its decision.

1 Sec. 8. HOTEL AND MOTEL USE

2 (a) The General Assembly finds that Vermont's reliance on hotels and  
3 motels for General Assistance emergency housing is unsustainable.

4 (b)(1) In fiscal year 2027, there shall be a maximum capacity of 400 hotel  
5 and motel rooms for the Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability  
6 Program.

7 (2) It is the intent of the General Assembly that hotel or motel rooms  
8 authorized for use as part of the Temporary Emergency Housing and  
9 Accountability Program be reduced to the minimum practicable level in fiscal  
10 year 2028 and eliminated only upon certification from the Commissioner for  
11 Children and Families to the House Committee on Human Services and to the  
12 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare that sufficient shelter and housing  
13 capacity exists statewide to meet demand.

14 (c) In fiscal years 2027 and 2028, the Department shall:

15 (1) increase VHIP-supported permanent housing units;  
16 (2) expand shelter capacity statewide; and  
17 (3) repurpose hotels and motels previously used for General Assistance  
18 emergency housing into transitional or workforce housing.

19 (d) Notwithstanding subsection (b) of this section, where no safe,  
20 reasonable alternative exists and denial of a hotel or motel room would likely  
21 result in imminent risk to health or safety, the Department may authorize

1       temporary hotel or motel placement pending appeal or transition to an  
2       appropriate alternative.

3       Sec. 9. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOUSING

4       (a) Domestic violence survivors shall be served through a program  
5       administered with Vermont domestic and sexual violence organizations under  
6       contract with the Department that is separate from the Temporary Emergency  
7       Housing and Accountability Program.

8       (b) Use of hotels and motels may continue for domestic violence survivors  
9       where no discrete, safe housing alternatives exist. Hotel and motel usage by  
10       domestic violence survivors shall not count toward the maximum capacities  
11       identified in Sec. 8 of this act.

12       Sec. 10. COLD-WEATHER EMERGENCY SHELTER

13       (a) The Department shall maintain sufficient cold-weather emergency  
14       shelter capacity to ensure that no individual is unsheltered during extreme  
15       weather conditions.

16       (b) Eligibility for cold-weather shelter shall not be limited by residency,  
17       disability, or time limits.

18       Sec. 11. RECOVERY AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

19       As recovery housing and transitional housing are integral components of the  
20       tiered continuum of care, the Agency of Human Services shall:

- 1        (1) expand access to recovery housing for individuals exiting
- 2        incarceration or treatment for substance use disorder; and
- 3        (2) support transitional housing models that bridge emergency housing
- 4        assistance and permanent housing.

5        Sec. 12. WORKFORCE AND PROVIDER STABILITY

6        The Agency of Human Services shall prioritize workforce stability in the  
7        implementation of this act, including:

- 8        (1) retention and recruitment incentives for shelter and housing staff;
- 9        (2) support for rural and mobile service delivery models; and
- 10       (3) expanded use of peer support and community-based staffing models.

11       Sec. 13. RULEMAKING

12       Pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25, the Commissioner shall adopt permanent  
13       rules for the implementation of the Temporary Emergency Housing and  
14       Accountability Program pursuant to this act as soon as feasible. While  
15       permanent rules are pending, the Commissioner shall adopt emergency rules,  
16       which shall be deemed to have met the standard in 3 V.S.A. § 844. Both the  
17       emergency and permanent rules shall address:

- 18       (1) document verification protocols for residency and disability status;
- 19       (2) random or targeted audits of eligibility documentation; and
- 20       (3) coordination with other State and federal benefit programs to prevent  
21       duplication.

1 Sec. 14. PROGRAM INTEGRITY REPORT

2 On January 15, 2027 and 2028, the Commissioner for Children and  
3 Families shall submit a written Program integrity report regarding the  
4 Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program to the House  
5 Committees on Appropriations and on Human Services and to the Senate  
6 Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare addressing:  
7 (1) the number of fraud investigations initiated and resolved;  
8 (2) the dollar value of improperly paid benefits recovered; and  
9 (3) the effectiveness of the verification and enforcement measures  
10 established in this act.

11 Sec. 15. TEMPORARY EMERGENCY HOUSING AND  
12 ACCOUNTABILITY PROGRAM; REPORT

13 (a) On January 15, 2027 and 2028, the Commissioner for Children and  
14 Families shall submit a written report about the implementation of the  
15 Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program since the start of  
16 the preceding fiscal year to the House Committees on Appropriations and on  
17 Human Services and to the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on  
18 Health and Welfare, with a copy posted on its website, addressing:  
19 (1) the number of individuals and households served through the  
20 Program, by household size and, if applicable, by eligibility category, region,  
21 service provider, and core service category;



1                   (11) the total expenditures by category, including per-household cost  
2                   comparisons across hotels, shelters, and permanent housing options;

3                   (12) the number of households whose intake assessment indicated a  
4                   potential need for services for each department within the Agency of Human  
5                   Services;

6                   (13) workforce capacity, vacancy rates, and service delivery impacts;  
7                   and

8                   (14) the identification of any indicators triggering a corrective action  
9                   plan, including:

10                   (A) an increase in unsheltered homelessness;  
11                   (B) statewide shelter capacity utilization exceeding 95 percent for  
12                   more than 30 consecutive days; or  
13                   (C) sanctions imposed on more than 15 percent of Program  
14                   participants within a reporting period.

15                   (b) If any indicator identified in subdivision (a)(14) of this section occurs,  
16                   the Department shall submit a corrective action plan to the House Committee  
17                   on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare within  
18                   60 days following the occurrence.

19                   Sec. 16. RETURN HOME PROGRAM

20                   (a) As the General Assembly recognizes that with limited human services  
21                   resources, some individuals experiencing homelessness may find that their

1       families or home states are better equipped to provide long-term care and  
2       support, there is established the Return Home Program administered by the  
3       Department in fiscal years 2027 and 2028. The Return Home Program shall  
4       provide travel expenses and relocation assistance for certain homeless  
5       individuals who wish to return to their home states. For the purposes of this  
6       Return Home Program, the Department shall:

- 7           (1) establish a public-private partnership for contracting with eligible  
8       nonprofit organizations or for-profit organizations;
- 9           (2) seek the participation of local transportation providers;
- 10          (3) work with homeless outreach programs to ensure that:
  - 11           (A) individuals who wish to participate in the Return Home Program  
12       are made aware of the Program; and
  - 13           (B) vulnerable populations, including victims of domestic violence or  
14       human trafficking, are not involuntarily displaced and participation is strictly  
15       voluntary;
- 16          (4) ensure that an individual may participate in the Program if the  
17       individual:
  - 18           (A) agrees to participate in the Return Home Program voluntarily and  
19       provides informed, written consent;
  - 20           (B) maintains legal residency in a state other than Vermont;
  - 21           (C) does not have a verifiable permanent address in Vermont;

1                   (D) lacks financial independence, including a return ticket or the  
2                   financial means to return home;  
3                   (E) is unemployed; and  
4                   (F) is reliant or at risk of becoming reliant on State assistance  
5                   programs;  
6                   (5) prohibit an individual with at least one dependent child who resides  
7                   in the State or an individual receiving medical treatment that cannot be  
8                   interrupted from participating in the Return Home Program;  
9                   (6) verify the information necessary to determine an individual's  
10                  eligibility for the Return Home Program to prevent fraudulent claims or  
11                  involuntary displacement;  
12                  (7) enable an individual who alleges involuntary participation or who  
13                  wishes to participate, but is denied eligibility, to immediately appeal the  
14                  decision to the Human Services Board;  
15                  (8) provide written disclosure in the individual's primary language and  
16                  provide interpreter services as needed, and a 72-hour cooling-off period before  
17                  travel, which the individual may request to waive; and  
18                  (9) submit a report on January 15, 2027 and 2028, to the House  
19                  Committees on Appropriations and on Human Services and to the Senate  
20                  Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare on the Return Home

1       Program addressing the number of participants, costs, outcomes, and any  
2       recommended legislation.

3       (b) The Department shall not take an adverse action or denial of other  
4       services against an individual for the individual's refusal to participate in the  
5       Return Home Program. The Department shall not condition other benefits on  
6       the individual's agreement to relocate under this section.

7       (c) Appeals related to Return Home Program determinations shall receive  
8       expedited review within five business days and relocation shall be  
9       automatically stayed pending decisions unless the applicant requests  
10       immediate travel.

11       (d) As used in this section:

12       (1) "Home state" means an individual's state of legal residence.

13       (2) "Permanent address" means a verifiable physical residence that an  
14       individual owns, rents, or resides in with family.

15       (3) "State assistance programs" means programs providing aid, such as  
16       subsidies, unemployment benefits, or any other form of public aid.

17       Sec. 17. APPROPRIATIONS

18       (a) In fiscal year 2027, \$30,000,000.00 is appropriated to the Department  
19       from the General Fund for the following purposes:

20       (1) \$10,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to operate the  
21       Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program.

1                   (2) \$6,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to expand statewide  
2                   shelter capacity.

3                   (3) \$4,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to contract for  
4                   additional transitional and recovery housing developments.

5                   (4) \$4,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to contract for the  
6                   repurposing of hotels and motels previously used for General Assistance  
7                   emergency housing into transitional and workforce housing.

8                   (5) \$6,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department for the expansion of  
9                   VHIP-supported permanent housing units.

10                  (b) In fiscal year 2028, it is the intent of the General Assembly to  
11                  appropriate \$25,000,000.00 from the General Fund to the Department for the  
12                  following purposes:

13                  (1) \$8,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to operate the  
14                  Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program.

15                  (2) \$6,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to expand statewide  
16                  shelter capacity.

17                  (3) \$3,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to contract for  
18                  additional transitional and recovery housing developments.

19                  (4) \$3,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department to contract for the  
20                  repurposing of hotels and motels previously used for General Assistance  
21                  emergency housing into transitional and workforce housing.

1                   (5) \$5,000,000.00 shall be used by the Department for the expansion of  
2                   VHIP-supported permanent housing units.

3                   (c) Any fiscal year 2027 unexpended funds shall be carried forward to  
4                   expand VHIP-supported housing units or expand shelter, recovery housing, or  
5                   transitional housing capacity, or both. It is the intent of the General Assembly  
6                   that any unexpended funds in fiscal year 2028 related to the Temporary  
7                   Emergency Housing and Accountability Program be carried forward for the  
8                   same purposes. Any funds carried forward pursuant to this section shall be  
9                   identified in the report required pursuant to Sec. 15 of this act.

10                  Sec. 18. EFFECTIVE DATE

11                  This act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.