

H.756

Introduced by Representatives Dobrovich of Williamstown, Burt of Cabot,  
Coffin of Cavendish, Galfetti of Barre Town, Goslant of  
Northfield, Morgan, M. of Milton, and Nielsen of Brandon

Referred to Committee on

Date:

Subject: Commerce and trade; residential rental agreements; landlord tenant;  
court procedure; ejectment; crimes and criminal procedure; human  
trafficking; Executive; Department of Housing and Community  
Development

Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to require a  
landlord to notify relevant housing authorities within 48 hours after providing a  
notice of termination to a tenant receiving housing assistance and to notify law  
enforcement of suspected human trafficking as soon as practicable after the  
occurrence of the suspected human trafficking; reduce the notice period for  
termination of a rental agreement when termination is based on criminal  
activity, illegal drug activity, human trafficking, or acts of violence to seven  
days; require a defendant to answer an ejectment complaint within five  
business days; authorize expedited hearings for an ejectment action based on  
suspected criminal activity; increase the maximum penalties for human  
trafficking violations and for knowingly permitting the sale of regulated drugs

1 in a dwelling or within 500 feet of a dwelling to 10 years in prison or a  
2 \$500,000.00 fine, or both; and create the landlord assistance program within  
3 the Department of Housing and Community Development to provide resources  
4 and financial reimbursement to landlords.

5 An act relating to termination of residential rental agreements based on  
6 criminal activity and increased penalties for crimes within a dwelling

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

8 Sec. 1. PURPOSE

9 The purpose of this act is to empower landlords to address drug and human  
10 trafficking in rental properties, ensure safe housing environments, enhance  
11 penalties for human trafficking, and prioritize community safety and recovery.

12 Sec. 2. 9 V.S.A. § 4457 is amended to read:

13 § 4457. LANDLORD OBLIGATIONS; HABITABILITY

14 \* \* \*

15 (d) Termination of tenancy. A landlord shall notify any relevant housing  
16 authority with 48 hours after providing notice of termination of a residential  
17 rental agreement under section 4467 of this title for a tenant receiving housing  
18 assistance.

19 (e) Criminal activity. A landlord shall notify law enforcement of suspected  
20 human trafficking, as that term is defined in 13 V.S.A. § 2651, as soon as

1 practicable after the occurrence of the suspected human trafficking within a  
2 dwelling unit owned or managed by the landlord.

3 Sec. 3. 9 V.S.A. § 4467 is amended to read:

4 § 4467. TERMINATION OF TENANCY; NOTICE

5 \* \* \*

6 (b) Termination for breach of rental agreement.

7 (1) The landlord may terminate a tenancy for failure of ~~the~~ a tenant,  
8 household member, or guest to comply with a material term of the rental  
9 agreement or with obligations imposed under this chapter by actual notice  
10 given to the tenant at least 30 days prior to the termination date specified in the  
11 notice.

12 (2) When termination is based on criminal activity, illegal drug activity,  
13 human trafficking, or acts of violence, any of which threaten the health or  
14 safety of other residents, the landlord may terminate the tenancy by providing  
15 actual notice to the tenant of the date on which the tenancy will terminate,  
16 which shall be at least ~~44~~ seven days from the date of the actual notice.

17 \* \* \*

18 Sec. 4. 12 V.S.A. § 4852 is amended to read:

19 § 4852. MODE OF PROCESS; DECLARATION; TRIAL BY JURY

20 (a) The process may issue as a summons or writ of attachment, requiring  
21 the defendant to appear and answer to the complaint of the plaintiff, which

1 shall state that the defendant is in the possession of the lands or tenements in  
2 question (describing them), which the tenant holds unlawfully and against the  
3 right of the plaintiff. A copy of the rental agreement, if any, and any notice to  
4 terminate the defendant's tenancy shall be attached to the complaint. Either  
5 party shall have the right to a trial by jury.

6 (b) Notwithstanding any other provision of law or rule, the defendant shall  
7 file an answer within five business days after receiving the complaint. The  
8 computation of the five-day period shall include the day on which the  
9 defendant receives the complaint.

10 (c) When the court sets the date for the initial hearing on the complaint,  
11 dates shall also be set for consideration of lease violations and for payment of  
12 rent into court if a motion for such payment was filed pursuant to section  
13 4853a, 4853b, or 4853c of this title.

14 Sec. 5. 12 V.S.A. § 4853c is added to read:

15 § 4853c. SUSPECTED CRIMINAL ACTIVITY; EXPEDITED HEARING

16 (a)(1) In an action for ejectment, the landlord, the landlord's agent, or the  
17 tenant may file a motion for a judgment that the plaintiff is entitled to  
18 immediate possession of the premises on the grounds that the termination of  
19 the rental agreement is based on criminal activity, illegal drug activity, human  
20 trafficking, or acts of violence, any of which threaten the health or safety of  
21 other residents under 9 V.S.A. § 4467(b).

1           (2) The motion may be filed and served with the complaint or at any  
2           time after the complaint has been filed. The motion shall be accompanied by  
3           an affidavit setting forth particular facts in support of the motion and a copy of  
4           the lease agreement.

5           (b) A hearing on the motion shall be held within 10 days after the motion is  
6           filed.

7           (c) At any time before the hearing, the defendant may oppose the motion  
8           pursuant to Rule 7(b)(6) of the Vermont Rules of Civil Procedure by filing an  
9           affidavit, a signed written statement, or a memorandum in opposition to the  
10          motion. The affidavit, signed written statement, or memorandum shall set  
11          forth particular facts to show that a genuine dispute of fact exists in relation to  
12          the motion.

13          (d) If the defendant fails to appear for the hearing, or to file an affidavit,  
14          signed written statement, or memorandum in opposition to the plaintiff's  
15          motion, or has failed to file an answer in the time provided pursuant to section  
16          4852 of this title, the plaintiff shall be entitled to judgment by default for  
17          immediate possession of the premises.

18          (e) If the court issues judgment in favor of the plaintiff pursuant to  
19          subsection (d) of this section, the court shall, on the date judgment is entered,  
20          issue a writ of possession directing the sheriff of the county in which the  
21          property or a portion thereof is located to serve the writ upon the defendant

1 and, not sooner than five days after the writ is served, to put the plaintiff into  
2 possession.

3 Sec. 6. 13 V.S.A. § 2659 is amended to read:

4 § 2659. KNOWINGLY PERMITTING HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN A  
5 DWELLING

6 (a) No person shall knowingly permit a dwelling, building, or structure  
7 owned by or under the control of the person to be used for the purpose of  
8 human trafficking or aggravated human trafficking in violation of section 2652  
9 or 2653 of this title.

10 (b) A person who violates this section shall be imprisoned not more than  
11 ~~two~~ 10 years or fined not more than ~~\$15,000.00~~ \$500,000.00, or both.

12 (c) It shall not be a violation of this section if the person who owns or  
13 controls the dwelling, building, or structure takes action to address the  
14 unlawful activity.

15 Sec. 7. 18 V.S.A. § 4252 is amended to read:

16 § 4252. KNOWINGLY PERMITTING SALE OF REGULATED DRUGS IN  
17 A DWELLING OR WITHIN 500 FEET OF A DWELLING

18 (a)(1) No person shall knowingly permit a dwelling, building, or structure  
19 owned by or under the control of the person to be used for the purpose of  
20 illegally selling a regulated drug.

1           (2) No person shall knowingly and unlawfully dispense or sell a  
2           regulated drug to any person within 500 feet of a residential dwelling unit.

3           (b) [Repealed.]

4           (c) A person who violates this section shall be imprisoned not more than  
5           ~~two~~ 10 years or fined not more than ~~\$15,000.00~~ \$500,000.00, or both.

6           (d) It shall not be a violation of this section if the person who owns or  
7           controls the dwelling, building, or structure takes action to address the  
8           unlawful activity.

9           Sec. 8. 9 V.S.A. § 4454a is added to read:

10          § 4454a. LANDLORD ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

11          (a)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development, in  
12          collaboration with the Department of Public Safety and the Department of  
13          Health, shall develop:

14                (A) guidelines for landlord screening processes to help prevent  
15                human trafficking while protecting prospective tenant privacy;

16                (B) training for landlords on identifying and reporting human  
17                trafficking activity; and

18                (C) coordination with law enforcement for swift eviction and  
19                prosecution of human trafficking offenders.

20          (2) Guidelines and trainings developed under this subsection shall be  
21          reviewed annually and updated as appropriate.

1        (b)(1) The Department of Housing and Community Development shall  
2        create and implement a landlord assistance program to reimburse landlords for  
3        legal costs related to termination and ejection of tenants due to human  
4        trafficking violations.

5        (2) Reimbursement under this subsection shall be limited to \$2,500.00  
6        per complaint.

7        Sec. 9. GUIDELINES

8        The Department of Housing and Community Development shall develop  
9        initial guidelines and trainings required by 9 V.S.A. § 4454a on or before  
10       January 1, 2027.

11       Sec. 10. APPROPRIATION

12       The sum of \$2,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the  
13       Department of Housing and Community Development in fiscal year 2027 for  
14       the purpose of funding the landlord assistance program created by 9 V.S.A.  
15       § 4454a.

16       Sec. 11. EFFECTIVE DATE

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