

1 H.938

2 Introduced by Committee on Human Services

3 Date:

4 Subject: Human services; emergency housing

5 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish a  
6 continuum of supports and services to prevent or divert households from  
7 homelessness and to address the needs of Vermonters who are homeless.

8 An act relating to establishing the Vermont Homelessness Response  
9 Continuum

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

11 \* \* \* Findings, Legislative Intent, and Purpose \* \* \*

12 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

13 The General Assembly finds that:

14 (1) although an imperfect tool for measuring the true number of  
15 unhoused Vermonters, the Vermont Homeless Management Information  
16 System as of December 2025 indicated that there were 4,022 individuals who  
17 were homeless in the State, 863 of whom were children under 18 years of age;  
18 and

1           (2) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that of the  
2           36,000 primary homes needed in Vermont between 2025 and 2029, the number  
3           needed to address homelessness is 3,295.

4           Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

5           It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

6           (1) unsheltered homelessness be eliminated and that homelessness in  
7           Vermont be rare, brief, and nonrecurring;

8           (2) Vermont reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel  
9           rooms for emergency housing;

10           (3) utilization of an emergency housing benefit to access hotels and  
11           motels through the General Assistance program end and be replaced by a  
12           continuum of services; and

13           (4) a continuum of supports and services be available to provide a stable  
14           pathway to permanent housing that meets the specific needs of households  
15           experiencing homelessness.

16           Sec. 3. PURPOSE

17           It is the purpose of this act to:

18           (1) establish a continuum of supports and services for households who  
19           are experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of experiencing  
20           homelessness;

1           (2) ensure that tailored, temporary emergency housing assistance is  
2           available to Vermonters in a manner that encourages efficient and accountable  
3           use of taxpayer funds;

4           (3) support self-sufficiency and reduce returns to homelessness by  
5           developing personalized housing plans with required participation by  
6           households;

7           (4) establish clear eligibility criteria and require active household  
8           participation;

9           (5) expand the use of alternative emergency housing models in  
10          partnership with municipalities, nonprofit community-based providers, and  
11          private landlords;

12          (6) integrate supportive services to assist households to achieve  
13          permanent housing stability;

14          (7) establish transparent accountability measures, reporting  
15          requirements, and oversight mechanisms;

16          (8) increase program efficiency and promote maximum flexibility in  
17          administering services and supports in the continuum;

18          (9) empower local communities to administer emergency housing  
19          services with maximum flexibility; and

20          (10) create a diversified system of emergency housing options,  
21          including shelters, specialized shelters, shared housing arrangements, host-

1 home models, master-lease units, and rapid rehousing placements, that provide  
2 cost-effective, sustainable, and supportive outcomes to households.

3 \* \* \* Creation of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum \* \* \*

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

5 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE CONTINUUM

6 § 2201. DEFINITIONS

7 As used in this chapter:

8 (1) “Alternative housing options” means housing options including  
9 shelters, specialized shelters, transitional housing, recovery residences, shared  
10 housing arrangements, host-home models, master-lease units, and rapid  
11 rehousing placements.

12 (2) “Applicant” means a household that applies for emergency housing  
13 assistance.

14 (3) “At risk of homelessness” means precariously housed without  
15 sufficient income, resources, or support to prevent homelessness.

16 (4) “Case management services” means individualized supportive  
17 services.

18 (5) “Coordinated entry” means a process that standardizes the way  
19 households at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness access and  
20 are assessed for and referred to the housing and services that a household  
21 needs for housing stability.

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

2           (7) “Disability” means a physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental, or  
3 mental health condition or substance use disorder that substantially limits one  
4 or more major life activities, or that requires ongoing support, accommodation,  
5 or treatment to maintain an individual’s health, safety, or independence. The  
6 term includes chronic or episodic conditions that significantly impact daily  
7 functioning, regardless of whether the individual is receiving, or is eligible to  
8 receive, federal disability benefits.

9           (8) “Diversion” means a strategy aimed at preventing homelessness by  
10 helping households find immediate alternative housing options instead of  
11 entering shelters. Diversion focuses on addressing the needs of those who  
12 have recently lost their housing.

13           (9) “Eligible household” means a household that is homeless and is  
14 physically present and intends to reside in Vermont as evidenced by active  
15 participation in a housing, employment, or other Agency of Human Services-  
16 recognized plan.

17           (10) “Emergency cold-weather shelter” means publicly funded shelter  
18 beds made available to households during periods when the National Weather  
19 Service is forecasting temperatures at or below 10 degrees Fahrenheit  
20 including windchill for the majority of the State.

1           (11) “Emergency housing” means temporary shelter, lodging, or other  
2           housing support, or related services provided to eligible households to protect  
3           the health, safety, and welfare of an eligible household when no safe housing  
4           option is immediately available.

5           (12) “Highly structured shelter” means a shelter that provides  
6           programming that emphasizes case management, housing stability,  
7           employment, education, or treatment services, as well as other services as  
8           appropriate, in a manner that accommodates an eligible household’s disability,  
9           if any.

10          (13) “Homeless” means:

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

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

13           (C) fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, dating violence,  
14           sexual assault, stalking, and other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that  
15           relate to violence against a household or household member that either takes  
16           place in the primary nighttime residence or causes the household or household  
17           member to be afraid to return to the primary nighttime residence;

18           (D) residing in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars,  
19           parks, abandoned buildings, or streets; or

20           (E) otherwise defined as homeless under federal law.

1           (14) “Household” means an individual or group of individuals, with or  
2           without children, including individuals who reside together as one economic  
3           unit, who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

4           (15) “Low-barrier shelter” means a shelter that minimizes barriers to  
5           entry by reducing the rules and programmatic requirements found in highly  
6           structured shelters, while still providing case management and other housing  
7           support services in a manner that accommodates an eligible household’s  
8           disability, if any.

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

10          (17) “Office” means of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

11          (18) “Permanent supportive housing” means long-term housing with  
12          wraparound services for individuals with complex health and social needs.

13          (19) “Prevention” means services intended to prevent a household from  
14          becoming homeless, including housing relocation or stabilization services or  
15          short-term rental assistance, including rental arrearage.

16          (20) “Program” means the Vermont Homelessness Response  
17          Continuum.

18          (21) “Rapid rehousing” means short- to medium-term rental assistance  
19          and supportive services aimed at assisting a household to quickly exit  
20          homelessness.

1           (22) “Shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s shelter  
2           standards.

3           (23) “Specialized shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s  
4           shelter standards and applicable standards for the delivery of additional  
5           services, including health care, mental health services, or services related to  
6           substance use disorder.

7           (24) “Supportive services” means individualized supports that assist a  
8           household in obtaining and maintaining housing, including:

9           (A) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness;

10          (B) household needs assessments;

11          (C) case management;

12          (D) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

13          (E) housing navigation services;

14          (F) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial  
15          assistance;

16          (G) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

17          (H) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the

18          household’s housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported

19          services, job training and employment services, services related to disability

20          and independent living advocacy, and referral to health care assistance,

21          including treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorder;

1           (I) progress monitoring of interventions; and

2           (J) services to ensure continuity after a permanent placement.

3           (25) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not  
4 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation, including  
5 cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or streets.

6           § 2202. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

7           CONTINUUM

8           (a) The Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum is established to  
9 create an array of services that prevent and address homelessness in Vermont.  
10 The Program shall be administered by the Department’s Office of Economic  
11 Opportunity.

12           (b) The Office shall maintain a continuum of services that is flexible,  
13 housing focused, and designed to prevent homelessness whenever possible.  
14 The continuum shall prioritize early intervention, rapid resolution of housing  
15 crises, and equitable access to emergency and permanent housing.

16           (c) The Program shall:

17           (1) provide temporary emergency housing to eligible households  
18 experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness;

19           (2) reduce reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing  
20 assistance;

1           (3) expand the use of alternative housing options in partnership with  
2           community organizations, municipalities, and private landlords;

3           (4) integrate case management and individualized housing plans into  
4           all emergency housing placements; and

5           (5) ensure accountability, transparency, and cost efficiency in the use  
6           of public funds.

7           § 2203. PROGRAM COMPONENTS

8           (a) The continuum of services shall consist of the following:

9                   (1) level 1: prevention and diversion services;

10                   (2) level 2: shelter services:

11                           (A) level 2A: highly structured shelter services; and

12                           (B) level 2B: low-barrier shelter services;

13                   (3) level 3: specialized shelter services;

14                   (4) level 4: permanent supportive housing services;

15                   (5) level 5: hotels and motels; and

16                   (6) other emergency housing services.

17           (b) The Office shall address each of the services in subsection (a) of this  
18           section by separate line items in its budget. The Department shall be  
19           responsible for any transfers to other Agency of Human Services departments  
20           necessary to implement the services listed in subsection (a) of this section.

21           The Department and other departments within the Agency of Human Services

1 shall maximize federal receipts, as applicable, for services listed in subsection  
2 (a) of this section.

3 (c) Upon assessing a household's needs, the Office or community partners  
4 shall place the household in the appropriate level of care to address the  
5 household's specific needs.

6 § 2204. PREVENTION AND DIVERSION SERVICES

7 Level 1: prevention and diversion services.

8 (1) Prevention and diversion services shall function as the primary entry  
9 point to the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum for all households,  
10 although connection may be made at any level. The Office shall ensure that  
11 prevention and diversion services are provided through an agreement with one  
12 or more community partners in each region of the State in a manner that  
13 accommodates an eligible household's disability, if any. All households, upon  
14 request for assistance, shall receive a brief, standardized initial prevention and  
15 diversion assessment to identify safe alternatives to homelessness and resolve  
16 immediate housing barriers.

17 (2) Prevention includes activities to avert entry into homelessness.

18 Diversion includes problem-solving interventions and supports that safely  
19 resolve a housing crisis without the use of shelter or hotel placements.

20 (3) Funds administered for prevention and diversion services shall have  
21 maximum flexibility.

1     § 2205. SHELTER SERVICES

2         (a) Level 2A: highly structured shelter services.

3             (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office  
4     shall determine the need for highly structured shelter services and develop  
5     sufficient highly structured shelter beds to address that need. The Department  
6     through the Office shall enter into agreements with community partners for the  
7     provision of highly structured shelter services for a period of not less than two-  
8     years at a time.

9             (2) Highly structured shelters shall provide programming that  
10    emphasizes case management, housing stability, employment, education, or  
11    treatment services, as well as other services as appropriate, in a manner that  
12    accommodates an eligible household's disability, if any. Eligible households  
13    receiving highly structured shelter services shall participate in case  
14    management and other services to the extent of the eligible household's ability.

15            (3) The Office shall ensure that highly structured shelter services meet  
16    the Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code  
17    (CVR 28-070-001).

18            (4) If an eligible household's needs cannot be met with the level 1  
19    prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter, highly  
20    structured shelter services are the preferred initial placement if capacity,  
21    staffing, and geographic accessibility are available.

1        (b) Level 2B: low-barrier shelter services.

2            (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office  
3        shall determine the need for low-barrier shelter services and develop sufficient  
4        low-barrier shelters to address that need. The Department through the Office  
5        shall enter into agreements with community partners for the provision of low-  
6        barrier shelters for a period of not less than two years at a time.

7            (2) Low-barrier shelters shall minimize barriers to entry by reducing the  
8        rules and programmatic requirements found in highly structured shelters, while  
9        still providing case management and other housing support services in a  
10       manner that accommodates an eligible household's disability, if any. Stays in  
11       low-barrier shelters shall be time limited, and eligible households shall be  
12       transitioned to highly structured shelter services or permanent housing as soon  
13       as feasible.

14           (3) The Office shall ensure that low-barrier shelter services meet the  
15       Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR  
16       28-070-001).

17           (4) If an eligible household's needs cannot be met with the level 1  
18       prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter or the highly  
19       structured shelter services in subsection (a) of this section, low-barrier shelter  
20       services may be utilized if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are  
21       available.

1     § 2206. SPECIALIZED SHELTER SERVICES

2         Level 3: specialized services.

3             (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose:

4                 (A) the relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall  
5             determine the need for and, to the extent funds permit, develop specialized  
6             shelter services that comply with the Department of Public Safety, Vermont  
7             Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR 28-070-001), as well as any other  
8             applicable standards relevant to the specialty population; and

9                 (B) the relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall enter  
10            into agreements with community partners for the provision of specialized  
11            shelter services for a period of not less than two years.

12            (2) Specialized service shelters shall provide services delivered in a  
13            highly structured shelter as well as additional specialty services, such as  
14            services for substance use disorder and mental and physical health conditions.  
15            Eligible households receiving specialized shelter services shall participate in  
16            case management and other services to the extent of the eligible household's  
17            ability.

18            (3) If an eligible household's needs cannot be met with the level 1  
19            prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter or the level 2  
20            shelter services in section 2205 of this chapter, a specialized service shelter

1 may be utilized if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are available  
2 and the eligible household requires specialized services.

3 § 2207. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

4 Level 4: Permanent supportive housing.

5 (1) The Agency of Human Services or any department within the  
6 Agency shall provide or enter an agreement for permanent supportive housing  
7 that combines long-term, community-based rental assistance with voluntary,  
8 flexible supportive services, such as family supportive housing and other  
9 supportive housing services funded in whole or in part by Medicaid, if the  
10 household and services are eligible for Medicaid.

11 (2) Eligible households receiving permanent supportive housing  
12 services shall participate in case management, planning for housing stability,  
13 and other services to the extent of the eligible household's ability.

14 (3) If an eligible household's needs cannot be met with the level 1  
15 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter, the level 2  
16 shelter services in section 2205 of this chapter, or the level 3 specialized  
17 shelter services in section 2206 of this chapter, permanent supportive housing  
18 may be utilized where capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are  
19 available.

1     § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS

2         Level 5: hotels and motels.

3             (1) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel  
4     and motel rooms. However, until sufficient permanent affordable housing or  
5     shelter services are available, the use of hotel and motel services shall be  
6     permitted.

7             (2) If a hotel or motel is utilized pursuant to this section, the Department  
8     shall:

9                 (A) enter into an agreement with one or more community partners to  
10     provide relevant supportive services to eligible households;

11                 (B) permit a population-specific placement to the extent certain  
12     populations are not isolated from the wider community served through the  
13     Program;

14                 (C) propose hotel and motel rates as part of its budget presentation  
15     for the General Assembly's consideration;

16                 (D) use only hotel and motel rates established by the General  
17     Assembly;

18                 (E) enter into agreements for the use of blocks of hotel and motel  
19     rooms and negotiate conditions of use for those blocks, including access to  
20     providers of case management and other supportive services, with space to  
21     provide services as negotiated; and

1           (F) ensure that services are not provided pursuant to this section on a  
2 night-by-night basis.

3           (3) If a hotel or motel is utilized pursuant to this section, the eligible  
4 household shall participate in case management services, planning for housing  
5 stability, and other services to the extent of the eligible household's ability.

6           (4) A hotel or motel used pursuant to this chapter shall comply with  
7 Program rules and the following rules:

8           (A) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule  
9 (CVR 13-140-023); and

10          (B) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety  
11 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

12          (5)(A) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose:

13           (i) between April 1 and November 30 of each year, the utilization  
14 of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this section shall be capped at 700 rooms  
15 per night; and

16           (ii) between December 1 and March 31 of each year, the  
17 utilization of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this section shall be capped at  
18 1,000 rooms per night.

19          (B) Hotel and motel rooms utilized by individuals served under 33  
20 V.S.A. § 602 shall not be included in the room caps provided in this  
21 subdivision (5).

1           (6) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met by levels 1–4 of the  
2           continuum as described in sections 2204–2207 of this chapter, the Office may  
3           utilize hotels and motels if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are  
4           available.

5           § 2209. OTHER EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES

6           (a) Municipal supports. The Department through the Office shall provide  
7           grants to municipalities in areas of the State with a high volume of unsheltered  
8           homelessness, including municipalities underserved by traditional funding  
9           sources. The use of this aid is at the discretion of the municipality and  
10           includes providing access to basic life-sustaining shelter when the National  
11           Weather Service declares a cold weather advisory. Shelter provided pursuant  
12           to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a coordinated entry  
13           assessment or case management, and shall have minimal data reporting  
14           requirements.

15           (b) Emergency cold-weather shelters. Emergency cold-weather shelters  
16           shall be managed through an agreement between the Office and one or more  
17           community partners to provide overnight, low-barrier shelter when weather  
18           conditions warrant. The Office and community partners shall ensure equitable  
19           access to emergency cold-weather shelters for communities with a high  
20           number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Shelter  
21           provided pursuant to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a

1 coordinated entry assessment or case management, and shall have minimal  
2 data reporting requirements.

3 (c) Alternative Agency of Human Services housing solutions. The Agency  
4 of Human Services, through its various departments, provides households with  
5 other time-limited or permanent housing. Such services include recovery  
6 housing, various residential supports for individuals with intellectual or  
7 developmental disabilities, home care services for older Vermonters and  
8 individuals with physical disabilities, transitional housing for individuals  
9 exiting correctional custody, and residential options for individuals with  
10 mental health challenges. Emergency housing provided through the Program  
11 is not intended in lieu of access to any other Agency of Human Services time-  
12 limited or permanent housing.

13 § 2210. HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

14 (a) Within the funds appropriated for this purpose, a household shall  
15 qualify for services under the Program if the household:

16 (1) is physically present and intends to reside in Vermont as evidenced  
17 by active participation in a housing, employment, or other Agency of Human  
18 Services–recognized plan;

19 (2) agrees to a coordinated entry assessment that prioritizes the  
20 household for permanent housing, unless explicitly exempt under this chapter;

1           (3) engages with a lead case management entity, such as a department of  
2           the Agency of Human Services or a community partner, to develop a housing  
3           plan and participate in employment, treatment, or other activities as  
4           appropriate, unless explicitly exempt from case management requirements  
5           under this chapter or by federal law; and

6           (4) abides by program rules and refrains from misconduct.

7           (b)(1) The Office or a community partner shall provide clear written notice  
8           to all applicants regarding penalties for fraud at the time of application.

9           (2) The Office or a community partner shall not impose a penalty upon  
10          a household for a good faith, immaterial error that was corrected upon notice  
11          within a reasonable period of time.

12          (3) A household that knowingly provides false, misleading, or  
13          incomplete information regarding residency, disability status, household  
14          composition, or other eligibility criteria shall be subject to termination of  
15          services within 30 days after receiving written notice from the Department or a  
16          community partner.

17          (4) Pending the outcome of a relevant Human Services Board hearing,  
18          the Office may refer cases of suspected fraud to the Office of the Attorney  
19          General or a State's Attorney for investigation and prosecution under  
20          applicable State law.

1       (c) A household may be terminated from the Program for repeatedly  
2 refusing suitable placements following documented suitability assessments and  
3 reasonable accommodations.

4       (d) A member or members of an eligible household may be subject to  
5 immediate termination of services as necessary for the safety of others if the  
6 member or members are engaged in:

7           (1) criminal activity; or

8           (2) misconduct that is not related to a disability or to victimization  
9 related to abuse, sexual assault, or stalking.

10       (e) As used in this section, “misconduct” means documented behaviors that  
11 materially endanger the safety of others, involve the intentional destruction of  
12 property, or constitute illegal activity.

13       § 2211. PRIORITIZATION

14       (a) The Office, either directly or through community partners, shall  
15 prioritize services within the funds appropriated for this purpose to eligible  
16 households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and have a  
17 member who:

18           (1) is 65 years of age or older;

19           (2) has a disability;

20           (3) is a minor child;

21           (4) is pregnant;

1           (5) is experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault,  
2           stalking, human trafficking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions;

3           or

4           (6) is under court-ordered eviction or constructive eviction due to  
5           circumstances over which the household has no control.

6           (b)(1) Proof of an eligible household's disability shall be verified by:

7           (A) a health care provider licensed or certified and practicing in  
8           Vermont;

9           (B) a determination or certification from a State- or federally-  
10          recognized agency or program that provides services to individuals with  
11          disabilities; or

12          (C) self-attestation by the eligible household, subject to verification  
13          by the State or community partner within 30 days when other documentation is  
14          not reasonably available at the time of application.

15          (2) The presence of an eligible household member's disability shall be  
16          verified by the Office or a community partner during the household's initial  
17          application process and shall be redetermined annually if the household is still  
18          receiving services. An eligible household with a member who has a lifelong  
19          disability, such as an intellectual or developmental disability, shall not be  
20          required to have the disability redetermined.

1        (c) The Office and community partners shall comply with the Americans  
2        with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101–12213, and section 504 of the  
3        Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, for the purposes of providing  
4        reasonable modifications, effective communication, and accessible placements.  
5        Program rules and case management requirements shall be reasonably  
6        modified, including the use of plain language, as necessary to avoid  
7        discrimination against eligible households with a member who has a disability.

8        § 2212. TIME LIMITS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

9        (a) Time limits for Program participation shall be governed by the level of  
10       service provided as follows:

11        (1) level 1: any temporary housing that is not provided in the form of  
12        temporary rental assistance through the Program’s prevention and diversion  
13        services shall not exceed 30 days per rolling 12-month period;

14        (2) level 2: the Office, in collaboration with shelter providers, shall  
15        establish the maximum length of stay in highly structured shelters and low-  
16        barrier shelters in rule or shelter standards;

17        (3) level 3: the Department, in collaboration with other relevant  
18        Agency of Human Services’ departments, shall establish the maximum length  
19        of stay in specialized shelters in rule or shelter standards;

1           (4) level 4: permanent supportive housing services may be utilized by  
2           an eligible household for as long as the eligible household's plan indicates it is  
3           necessary; and

4           (5) level 5: hotels and motels:

5           (A) between April 1 and November 30 of each year, eligible  
6           households may receive housing at hotels and motels with supportive services  
7           for not more than 70 days per rolling 12-month period; and

8           (B) between December 1 and March 31 of each year, eligible  
9           households may receive continual services in cold-weather-use hotels and  
10          motels, which shall not be applied toward the time limit established in  
11          subdivision (A) of this subdivision (5).

12          (b) The Department may grant extensions to the time limits established in  
13          subsection (a) of this section pursuant to criteria adopted in rule, including for:

14           (1) an eligible household actively awaiting a placement in housing,  
15          treatment, or other services;

16           (2) medical necessity;

17           (3) lack of reasonable alternative accessible placements for a member of  
18          the eligible household with a disability; and

19           (4) imminent risk to the health or safety of one or more of the eligible  
20          household's members.

1     § 2213. CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

2         Each eligible household shall be assigned a lead case manager, except  
3     where specifically exempted for certain services, which may be from any  
4     Agency of Human Services department or a community partner. Case  
5     management services provided pursuant to this chapter shall be informed by  
6     the acuity level of the eligible household and include individualized supports  
7     that connect an eligible household to public assistance, health care,  
8     employment, permanent housing, and other services. A household may  
9     request a specific case manager or a change in case manager.

10    § 2214. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

11         The Office and community partners shall provide advice and consultation to  
12    the Department of Housing and Community Development in its completion of  
13    a needs assessment that identifies gaps in services for households that are  
14    homeless in the State and includes recommendations to ensure the provision of  
15    equitable services throughout the State.

16    § 2215. NOTICE; APPEALS; RIGHT TO FAIR HEARING

17         (a) The Office or a community partner shall provide written notice to any  
18    applicant or household whose participation in the Program is denied, reduced,  
19    suspended, or terminated. Notice shall include:

20             (1) the specific factual and legal basis for the Office or community  
21    partner's decision;

1           (2) the effective date of the action, which in the case of termination,  
2           reduction, or suspension of services shall not be sooner than 30 days after the  
3           date of the written notice, in the household's preferred method of  
4           communication;

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

7           (4) clear instructions, in plain language, on the process and deadlines for  
8           filing an appeal.

9           (b) An applicant for or a recipient of assistance pursuant to this chapter  
10          may file a request for a fair hearing with the Human Services Board pursuant  
11          to 3 V.S.A. § 3091 when:

12           (1) an application for assistance under the Program is denied in whole  
13           or part;

14           (2) a household's benefits are terminated, reduced, or suspended; or

15           (3) the household believes that benefits have not been provided in  
16           accordance with applicable rules or policies.

17          (c) An applicant or household shall file a request for a fair hearing with the  
18          Human Services Board within 60 days after the date of the written notice  
19          pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

20          (d) If a household files a request for a fair hearing within 14 days after  
21          receiving notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Office or

1 community partner providing notice shall continue to provide services under  
2 the Program without interruption until a decision is issued by the Human  
3 Services Board, unless:

4 (1) the household voluntarily waives continued services; or

5 (2) a household or household's member's continued receipt of services  
6 poses a risk of safety to others.

7 (e) The hearing shall be conducted in accordance with due process  
8 standards, including the right to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses,  
9 and be represented by counsel or another authorized representative.

10 (f) The Human Services Board shall issue a written decision that sets forth  
11 findings of fact, conclusions of law, and the basis for its decision, and the  
12 process for appealing the decision to the Vermont Supreme Court.

13 (g) If the Human Services Board issues 20 substantially identical decisions  
14 brought by Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum applicants or  
15 recipients, the Department and community partners shall adopt the Board's  
16 interpretation as part of its administration of the Program and the Department  
17 shall revise the Program rules accordingly.

18 § 2216. RULEMAKING

19 The Department shall adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 for the  
20 implementation of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum,  
21 addressing at a minimum:

- 1           (1) requirements for community providers participating in the Program;
- 2           (2) standards for highly structured, low-barrier, and specialized shelters;
- 3           (3) documentation requirements for household eligibility, including
- 4 disability;
- 5           (4) required elements for supportive services, including case
- 6 management;
- 7           (5) the creation of a brief, standardized initial assessment form that may
- 8 be completed by hand, electronically, or by telephone;
- 9           (6) a process for issuing timely, written approval or denial notifications
- 10 to applicants;
- 11           (7) a process for issuing advanced notice to households when the
- 12 household is being terminated from the program;
- 13           (8) applicant and household appeal procedures;
- 14           (9) time limits for Program participation, including procedures for
- 15 extensions;
- 16           (10) expectations for the Office's oversight and quality monitoring; and
- 17           (11) other subjects as deemed necessary.

18    § 2217. REPORTING

- 19           (a) Annually, as part of the Department's budget presentation, the
- 20 Department shall provide a status report addressing each level of the Vermont

1 Homelessness Response Continuum. Minimally, the status report shall  
2 address:

3 (1) the number of households served within each level of the  
4 continuum;

5 (2) the average length of participation for households within each level  
6 of the continuum and the rate at which households successfully transition to  
7 permanent housing;

8 (3) the number of households diverted from entering shelters or hotel  
9 and motel placements through prevention and diversion services;

10 (4) the utilization of hotels and motels, including:

11 (A) the average nightly number of rooms used;

12 (B) the average and median length of stay; and

13 (C) the extent to which hotel and motel usage has decreased relative  
14 to the prior fiscal year;

15 (5) housing stability outcomes, including rates of return to homelessness  
16 within six and 12 months following exit from the Program;

17 (6) an assessment of regional capacity and access to services, including  
18 identification of geographic areas with unmet needs or disproportionate  
19 utilization of emergency housing resources;

1           (7) total expenditures by continuum level and funding source, including  
2           State, federal, and other funds, and an analysis of cost efficiency across  
3           housing models; and

4           (8) any operational barriers to implementation of the continuum, along  
5           with recommendations for administrative or legislative action.

6           (b) Annually, as part of the Department’s budget presentation, the  
7           Department shall set goals for increased housing capacity, including permanent  
8           supportive housing, permanent affordable housing, and shelter beds. The  
9           Department shall provide data pertaining to the increased shelter capacity and  
10           the extent to which shelter capacity meets the needs of eligible households  
11           experiencing homelessness each year.

12           (c) On or before the last day of each month, the Office, or other relevant  
13           agency or department, shall post on its website a substantially similar report to  
14           that due pursuant to 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 81, Sec. 6(b), including the  
15           Office’s monthly expenditure on the Program by level.

16                           \* \* \* Continuums of Care; Required Merger \* \* \*

17           Sec. 5. MERGER OF CONTINUUMS OF CARE

18           (a) In order to promote the effective use of resources and continuity of  
19           care, the Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic  
20           Opportunity shall work in collaboration with the Chittenden County Homeless  
21           Alliance, the Balance of State Continuum of Care, and the U.S. Department of

1 Housing and Urban Development to establish a single continuum of care in the  
2 State on or before October 1, 2028.

3 (b) On or before January 15, 2028, the Office shall submit a written report  
4 to the House Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on  
5 Health and Welfare summarizing efforts to establish a single continuum of care  
6 pursuant to this section.

7 \* \* \* Effective October 1, 2028, Requirements of Grantees \* \* \*

8 Sec. 6. 33 V.S.A. § 2218 is added to read:

9 § 2218. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

10 Any grant or other agreement executed by the Agency of Human Services  
11 or its departments shall require a community partner, as appropriate, to:

12 (1) participate in the local housing coalition or other group established  
13 to assist eligible households who are homeless;

14 (2) utilize the coordinated entry assessment for eligible households who  
15 are homeless or at risk of homelessness;

16 (3) utilize the appropriate planning process and options for an eligible  
17 household transitioning into permanent housing, including for eligible  
18 households with an individual who has an intellectual or developmental  
19 disability, older Vermonters, or individuals transitioning from a correctional  
20 facility or hospital; and





1     § 602. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND SHELTER FOR HOUSEHOLDS

2             EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

3             The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a statewide  
4             organization to provide or cause to be provided supportive services and shelter  
5             to those households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or  
6             sexual violence. If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities  
7             under this section, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that  
8             there is not a gap in services.

9                     \* \* \* Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program \* \* \*

10     Sec. 11. VERMONT RENTAL ASSISTANCE BRIDGE PROGRAM

11             (a) The Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program is established within  
12             the Vermont State Housing Authority for the purpose of linking households  
13             who require rental assistance to permanent housing when the household does  
14             not otherwise have access to relevant U.S. Department of Housing and Urban  
15             Development rental assistance. The Program shall be accessible to eligible  
16             clients served by each of the Agency of Human Services' departments.

17             (b) The Program shall be available to a household for not more than 24  
18             months and shall not provide the full amount of the household's rental  
19             payment. Program payments shall be made directly from the Vermont State  
20             Housing Authority to a household's landlord.

1        (c) Program priority shall be given to current recipients of the HOME  
2        Program, established pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 321(b)(2), who have not yet  
3        reached 24 months of rental assistance.

4        (d) The Vermont State Housing Authority and relevant departments of the  
5        Agency of Human Services shall jointly work to:

6            (1) incorporate any existing rental assistance funded by the Agency and  
7            its department into the Program established in this section; and

8            (2) establish eligibility criteria and any prioritization that may be  
9            necessary for this use of funds appropriated for this Program.

10        (e) It is the intent of the General Assembly that funds are appropriated for  
11        the Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program through fiscal year 2030.

12        \* \* \* Payment Rate Structure and Fiscal Year 2027 Expenditures \* \* \*

13        Sec. 12. PAYMENT RATE STRUCTURE; SHELTER SERVICES

14        The Department for Children and Families, in collaboration with the  
15        Agency of Human Services and relevant community partners, shall establish a  
16        payment rate structure, including periodic rate reviews, for all shelter services  
17        required by this act. The structure shall include a base rate and potential for  
18        supplemental payment to the base if necessary and appropriate. On or before  
19        April 1, 2027, the Department shall submit a report to the House Committee  
20        on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

1 regarding the implementation of the payment rate structure and the  
2 Department's proposed timeline for implementation.

3 Sec. 13. FISCAL YEAR 2027 CAPPED ROOM RATES

4 In fiscal year 2027, the Department for Children and Families or  
5 community partners shall not pay a hotel or motel establishment providing  
6 emergency housing more than the hotel's lowest advertised room rate and not  
7 more than \$80 a day per room to shelter a household participating in the  
8 Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum. The Department for Children  
9 and Families or community partners may shelter a household in more than one  
10 hotel or motel room depending on the household's size and composition.

11 Sec. 14. EXPENDITURES; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE  
12 CONTINUUM

13 ~~(a) This act provides for the fiscal year 2027 expenditure of~~  
14 ~~\$82,634,153.00 for the provision of services, implementation of the Vermont~~  
15 ~~Homelessness Response Continuum, shelter development and operation, rental~~  
16 ~~assistance, and supportive services, including case management.~~

*(a) This act provides for the fiscal year 2027 expenditure of  
\$82,634,153.00 for the provision of services, implementation of the Vermont  
Homelessness Response Continuum, shelter development and operation, rental  
assistance, and supportive services, including case management, as follows:*

(1) \$39,284,606.00 for the Housing Opportunity Grant Program operations, of which \$38,251,696.00 is base funding from the General Fund, \$830,422.00 is federal funding, and \$202,488.00 is from the Global Commitment Fund;

(2) \$4,400,000.00 for the shelter development, of which \$1,400,000.00 is base funding from the General Fund and \$3,000,000.00 is one-time funding from the General Fund;

(3) \$23,870,000.00 for emergency housing in hotels and motels, of which \$9,751,120.00 is base funding from the General Fund and \$14,118,880.00 is one-time funding from the General Fund;

(4) \$2,400,000.00 for case management, of which \$2,400,000.00 is base funding from the General Fund;

(5) \$4,200,000.00 for permanent supportive housing and family supportive housing, of which \$778,987.00 is base funding from the General Fund and \$3,421,013.00 is from the Global Commitment Fund;

(6) \$3,000,000.00 for rental assistance, of which \$3,000,000.00 is base funding from the General Fund;

(7) \$500,000.00 for grants to municipalities, of which \$500,000.00 is one-time funding from the General Fund;

(8) \$1,500,000.00 for emergency cold weather shelters, of which \$1,500,000.00 is one-time funding from the General Fund;

(9) \$314,618.00 for other expenses, of which \$314,618.00 is from federal funding; and

(10) \$3,164,929.00 for staffing, grants, and contracts, of which \$1,100,000.00 is base funding from the General Fund and \$2,064,929.00 is one-time funding from the General Fund.

1        (b) Any funds that remain unspent at the end of fiscal year 2027 shall be  
2        carried forward for the same purpose for which they were originally  
3        appropriated in this section.

4        (c) Any funds appropriated for General Assistance emergency housing or  
5        the Housing Opportunity Grant Program that remain unspent at the end of  
6        fiscal year 2026 shall be carried forward for investment in the Vermont  
7        Homelessness Response Continuum in fiscal year 2027.

8                    \* \* \* Removing General Assistance Annual Report \* \* \*

9        Sec. 15. 33 V.S.A. § 2115 is amended to read:

10       § 2115. ~~GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REPORT~~

11       ~~On or before September 1 of each year, the Commissioner for Children and~~  
12       ~~Families shall submit a written report to the Joint Fiscal Committee; the House~~  
13       ~~Committees on Appropriations, on General, Housing, and Military Affairs, and~~  
14       ~~on Human Services; and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on~~  
15       ~~Health and Welfare. The report shall contain the following:~~

