

Greetings to the House Appropriations Committee:

I am the pastor of First United Methodist Church of Brattleboro, 18 Town Crier Drive. We have a small request to benefit our community's response to homelessness.

Who we are: First UMC works and worships together with First Baptist Church of Brattleboro as the Beloved Community. FUMC owns the church which we share. Last year, we were approached by a community group to be the location of the area emergency overnight shelter. We supported it 100% and opened our doors. The group's financial agent is Skyberry House which provides other transitional housing here. Funds from the Vermont appropriation through VIA flow through Skyberry for this site.

At the start, the state Fire Marshal was only able to allow us 8 sleepers per night, except when it was -10 or lower, when the number rose to 15. This is with a first floor open room served by 5 exit doorways, with two awake staff members all night. This was later changed to allow 12 sleepers every night but only for the winter ending March 31st.

This is because our building, erected in 1970, does not have sprinklers. So we investigated this and were given an estimate of \$80,000 for the installation. This would also require a new water main that would add around \$20,000. We do not have even enough for that water main in reserve.

We have told the team that we would be available 365 days a year, if there was a way to install a sprinkler system. If the state were to make this investment, the church would be more than happy to make sure that our space was available for emergency shelter all nights. Anything that the committee can do to aid in this, would be most appreciated, especially by those who are housing insecure or homeless.

This program with a sprinkler could house many more persons in our dining hall. With Brattleboro stopping people from outdoor encampments, and restricting even day shelters in the downtown, we need more innovative options. We are happy that Winston Prouty is now housing families, Groundworks is working on a Woman's Shelter, and other low and mixed income housing projects are on the books for development. We still have need for more shelter, especially with the motel funding reduced. Simply putting sprinklers in our building would create such an opportunity that has broad community support.

There are several articles in the Brattleboro Reformer, including a good report today (2-19-26). You might also speak with Cristina ShayOnye who is leading the supervision of the shelter. 802-246-7870 shayonye@gmail.com.

Thank you.

I verify this is true to the best of my knowledge.

+ **Rev. Ralph W. Howe, Pastor**

The Beloved Community VT

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