



February 23, 2026

Representative Marc Mihaly
Chair, House Committee on General & Housing
Vermont State Legislature
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Submitted via email

Dear Representative Mihaly and committee members,

I am writing to provide insights on why I support the changes to current eviction timelines proposed in H722. I am also including insights on why I support changes to the No Trespass regulations proposed in H728. While I recognize that this latter bill originated in the House Judiciary Committee, I understand that it will be considered by the House Committee on General & Housing and that, if supported by committee members, it's language may be rolled into H722.

I've developed these insights in my role as Executive Director of the Windham & Windsor Housing Trust, a 38-year-old non-profit which provides permanently affordable rental housing to more than 1,000 residents across a 2-county footprint. In addition, we provide supportive services to our residents through the SASH Program in Windsor and in Brattleboro, the SASH for All Program. I've also worked closely with the Brattleboro Police Department as they expanded their community policing strategies that balance compassion and accountability and are built on close collaboration with housing providers and social service agencies. In spite of these progressive approaches, when highly disruptive and illegal activities happen on our properties, we simply do not have the legal tools to address them quickly and effectively.

Updating existing regulations so that evictions can be accomplished with a faster timeline and so that housing providers can more effectively limit disruptive guests and unauthorized tenants on our properties will have a positive impact on the wellbeing of all residents who live in rental housing as well as the neighborhoods where they reside.

This is critically important because our current legal framework does not adequately address the current conditions many of our community's face. As you are already aware, Vermont

communities are grappling with an opioid crisis like nothing we've seen before. New synthetic drugs are hundreds of times more addictive and have a shorter impact cycle than the street drugs consumed in the past and the distribution network is more sophisticated and savvy as well. As a result, when a tenant is either being exploited by drug dealers or engaged in drug trafficking themselves, all the residents in the building and the surrounding neighborhood are dramatically impacted in very traumatizing ways.

Users will go to almost any length to obtain the drug that will alleviate severe withdrawal symptoms and drug traffickers protect their business at all cost. For example, in one downtown building in Brattleboro, after finally fixing the front door that had been pried open with a crow bar numerous times, rendering it unable to lock, desperate users took to scaling the trellis mounted on the exterior wall in order to break into a second-floor hallway window. Drug traffickers inside the building destroyed the cameras we had installed to document activity and installed their own doorbell ring cameras so they could see whenever there was police presence or property management staff in the building. These traffickers were not hesitant to harass and threaten staff and other residents, often making it clear that they are carrying firearms which are an effective intimidation tool. It took over a year to collect enough evidence to mount an eviction for cause case and to complete the eviction process for the tenant who was the center of this activity. All the while, the other 21 tenants in the building were faced with intimidating 'guests' in and out of the building, needles in the stairwells, loud noise at night and a gnawing sense that nobody cared about their situation. The Housing Trust's property management staff, doing everything they could within the confines of the law, similarly felt demoralized that they couldn't provide a better living environment for our residents. Several staff members left the field for other jobs, citing the stress of this situation on their own wellbeing.

In another example, described in detail by a resident and submitted in separate testimony, a resident invited her boyfriend to live with her after we had signed a lease solely with her and together, they promptly began a drug trafficking operation in a 5-unit building. We initiated eviction proceedings as soon as we became aware of the situation, but despite two drug raids resulting in their arrest and the confiscation of drugs and weapons, they were back in their apartment the next day and resumed their disruptive activities while awaiting trial. Tenants could not sleep through the night because of the constant traffic in and out of the building and their hallways, laundry room, and outside storage spaces were all taken over by this operation. They were living in a constant state of fear and intimidation.

While these situations are not the norm, when they do occur, they are highly disruptive and traumatizing and they require a rapid response. Residents living in affordable housing cannot easily choose another housing option, particularly in the housing crisis so they are often stuck with these dynamics and rely on their landlord to address the situation. A speedier eviction process and a more effective No Trespass tool could work in combination to address situations like this and alleviate suffering more quickly. The benefits of a shorter eviction process are obvious because the duration of suffering for everyone impacted is lessened. It can also preserve valuable housing resources since often, once an eviction notice is served for situations

described above, the resident often ceases to pay rent. Combined with high legal costs, and the cost to repair to damaged units, these situations are very expensive to address, pulling valuable resources away from other routine repairs and tenant support activities.

The value of an updated No Trespass tool may be less obvious, but nonetheless critical to developing a better, more effective response. Currently, in order to “No Trespass” a guest of a tenant, everyone in the building, including the tenant who is hosting the guest, must sign the No Trespass order. It is very rare to obtain a signature of consent from 100% of the tenants because the intimidation tactics that are inherent to protecting illegal activity are so effective. In some cases, the tenant themselves are being exploited in exchange for the use of their apartment and in others the tenant is actively engaged in the illegal activity themselves. Regardless of the situation, if everyone in the building doesn’t agree, the property owner has no right to restrict any ‘guest’ from being on the property. This means that in both of the scenarios I described above, the Housing Trust had no legal tools to address the steady stream of ‘guests’ who were visiting their friends all hours of the day and night. It’s no wonder that residents report feeling abandoned by the system.

These insights are why I strongly support the changes proposed in the H722 and H728. Taken together, they provide a process that maintains due process and protections for the individuals involved, but also takes into account the rights and wellbeing of those who are impacted by their actions. This balance of individual rights and community health and wellbeing is critically important if we are going to address this particular impact of the opioid crisis.

I know that some will say that we need to address the underlying causes of this situation. I wholeheartedly agree with this. We desperately need more medically supported drug treatment, sober housing options, and supportive communities that help people reclaim their lives and reenter society in positive ways. These are longer term solutions, some of which the Housing Trust is working to bring to fruition. However, I strongly believe that this isn’t an either/or situation. We need better strategies and resources to support those suffering from drug addiction and we also need better strategies and tools to hold people accountable for behavior that traumatizes others and disrupts whole communities. I believe the changes to eviction timelines proposed in H722 and the updated No Trespass regulations proposed in H728 will accomplish this.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide these insights and to share some stories that illustrate the challenges we’ve faced. I am happy to answer questions or provide more detail either in writing or in committee meeting.

Respectfully,



Elizabeth Bridgewater
Executive Director