



Written Testimony of Green Mountain Justice

In Opposition to H. 772

Submitted to the House Committee on General and Housing

Vermont General Assembly, 2025–2026 Session

Submitted by Tom Morgan, Founder & Executive Director

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Who We Are

Green Mountain Justice is a community justice ministry working across Vermont. We care for marginalized neighbors. We connect people across difference. We collaborate for systemic change. That is our full spectrum: from going under bridges and into encampments to advocating in hearing rooms like this one.

Our Neighbor Care Network journeys with community members experiencing homelessness, housing insecurity, poverty, and intersectional marginalization. We do not work *for* our neighbors. We work *with* them. There is a world of difference in that small word.

Much of our recent work has focused on advocating directly for neighbors under threat of eviction. These are neighbors suffering from multiple vectors of marginalization at once: poverty, disability, racism, untreated mental health challenges, substance use disorders. Eviction does not just take away a roof. It compounds every other form of harm a person is already navigating. We have watched it destroy progress that took months of relational care to build.

We also work closely with neighbors who have been further traumatized living in Vermont's system of "transitional" shelters and housing provided by nonprofit housing "providers." Too often, these systems re-traumatize the very people they claim to serve. Neighbors report being treated as cases to manage rather than people to know. The conditions, the surveillance, the loss of autonomy, and the racism some BIPOC neighbors experience in these settings cause real harm. We hear these stories every week.

Our *Voices from the Edge* podcast, featured on Vermont Public's *Vermont Edition*, amplifies the stories of neighbors who are too often spoken about but rarely heard from directly. Our *Living Together* op-ed series in the Addison Independent won first place in the New England Better Newspaper Competition. Not because we are skilled writers. Because our neighbors who live at the edge are skilled truth-tellers.



How We Work: An Ecosystem, Not a Program

We share this context because it matters for how legislators think about housing policy. GMJ is not a traditional social service agency. We are building a Neighbor Care ecosystem: a living network of relationships that produces outcomes no transactional system can replicate.

At the center of that ecosystem are our Neighbor Care Neighbors. Other organizations call them “volunteers.” We don’t. They are neighbors of privilege who have been trained in active listening, cultural humility, and trauma-responsive care. They are vetted by GMJ. They commit to showing up week after week. Not with clipboards and intake forms. With presence. With grocery cards handed over alongside a real conversation about how life is going. With rides to appointments and texts that say, “I’m thinking about you.”

Around those relationships, we have built a network of trusted, GMJ-vetted service collaborators: housing advocates, legal aid partners, medical providers, mental health professionals, and community organizations who share our commitment to dignity-centered care. When a neighbor needs something beyond what a relationship can provide, we know who to call and we make that connection personally. Not through a referral form. Through a phone call from someone who knows both parties.

We have also created our Neighbors’ Table gatherings: “third spaces” where neighbors of difference come together across every kind of boundary. Unhoused neighbors and housed neighbors. People in recovery and people in crisis. Families navigating poverty and families navigating privilege. At our Table, no one is a client and no one is a provider. Everyone is a neighbor. Trust develops. Relationships form. And those relationships produce things that no program ever could.

Here is what we mean by that. The relationships built through our Neighbor Care ecosystem and our Neighbors’ Table have directly led to families finding housing, neighbors finding employment, and isolated people gaining basic social connections that most of us take for granted. A Neighbor Care Neighbor helps a mother navigate the housing application that had overwhelmed her. A conversation at the Table leads to a job lead that no caseworker would have known about. A friendship formed across difference gives someone a reason to stay in recovery when the system has given them every reason to quit.

The current transactional, overburdened system of care cannot replicate these outcomes. It is not designed to. It is designed to process people, not to know them. Our ecosystem demonstrates what becomes possible when you replace transaction with relationship, distance with proximity, and program metrics with actual human transformation.



This matters for the debate over H. 772 because every eviction that this bill makes faster and easier will tear through the relational fabric we are building. It will push neighbors back into crisis, back into shelters that re-traumatize them, back into the cycle of instability that costs Vermont far more than the relationships that break it.

What Equity Demands

One of GMJ's core values is **Equity**. We define it clearly: we respect the inherently equal worthiness of every person, and we strive to co-create a world in which no one's needs are subordinated to another's.

Equity means more than respecting the equal and inherent worth of each of our neighbors. It means refusing to subordinate the needs of the marginalized to those of the privileged. Landlords have lobbyists. They have trade associations. They have direct access to legislators and the resources to hire attorneys when disputes arise. The neighbors GMJ serves have none of that. Many cannot take a day off work to testify. Many lack transportation to Montpelier. Many have learned through bitter experience that the system was not built for them.

The power dynamics at play in this legislation deserve plain language. When GMJ reached out to participate in testimony on H. 772, we were told by the committee's assistant that there was no room at the testimony table due to a "full agenda" of other speakers. Let that sink in. A community justice ministry advocating on behalf of unhoused and housing-insecure neighbors could not get a seat. But the landlords, the trade associations, and the industry representatives who stand to benefit from loosened eviction standards had no trouble being heard. That is not an accident. That is what structural inequity looks like when it is built into the legislative process itself. When only one side of a housing debate can access the table, the policy outcomes will reflect that access.

This testimony reflects the **unanimous position** of our Neighbor Matters Council. The Council is GMJ's advisory body made up of unhoused and housing-insecure neighbors, many of whom have personally suffered evictions. They are the experts on what eviction does to a human life. Their voices should carry weight in this process.

Why We Oppose H. 772



On balance, the harms of this bill outweigh any potential benefits. We share the assessment of Vermont Legal Aid and other advocates: as drafted, and especially as it is likely to move forward, this bill will worsen Vermont's housing and homelessness crisis.

We understand the committee may strip out protections against no-cause eviction and rent stabilization. If that happens, what remains is a bill that primarily serves landlord interests: shortened eviction timelines, a faster and easier eviction process, and fewer procedural protections for tenants. That is not balance. That is capitulation.

Homelessness in Vermont has increased over 320% in five years. BIPOC neighbors are five times more likely to experience it. Hundreds of Vermonters face another winter without stable shelter. In this context, making it faster and easier to evict people is not a housing policy. It is a displacement policy.

We are also deeply concerned that the committee has indicated it will not take testimony from the judiciary on a bill that directly alters court procedures and eviction processes. That is a significant procedural gap that should trouble every lawmaker committed to sound policymaking.

Listen to the Stories

We encourage every member of this committee to listen to the voices of the neighbors who will be most affected by this legislation. Not the talking points of trade associations. Not the policy briefs of lobbyists. The actual voices of people living at the intersections of poverty, housing insecurity, and systemic marginalization.

Our *Voices from the Edge* podcast features neighbors like Jessica, a working mother who fought for nearly two years to secure stable housing while raising three children in a single motel room and volunteering as an EMT. Like Jerome, a Black veteran navigating racism and systemic barriers while experiencing homelessness, who was exited from Vermont's motel shelter program and had to leave Addison County entirely because no rooms were available. Who chose to sleep outside rather than subject himself to the racism he experienced in shelters. Like Matt and Liz, Vermonters who fell from working-class stability into sleeping under bridges after health crises devastated their finances.

These are not abstractions. These are your constituents. They deserve to be heard before you make it easier to push them further to the margins.

Listen: [Voices from the Edge on RedCircle](#) | greenmountainjustice.org/stories

The Deeper Problem



Yes, Vermont has an affordable housing problem. Nobody disputes that. But housing scarcity alone does not explain homelessness. More and more scholars and practitioners are pointing to two deeper failures.

First, our systems are failing. The social service infrastructure that is supposed to catch people when they fall is buckling under the weight of too many needs and too few resources. Throwing Vermonters out of housing faster and into an already overburdened network of shelters and human services is not a solution. It is an acceleration of the crisis.

Second, we are losing the humanity it takes to reach directly out to our neighbors in need. Relational poverty is real. Broken family relationships, neighbors who don't know each other, communities that have outsourced care to institutions instead of practicing it themselves. That disconnection is at the root of homelessness as much as any rent payment.

You will never be able to outsource the connection, care, and collaboration it takes to dig out of this mess. You cannot legislate your way out by continuing to lean on existing "providers" and systems of care that are already stretched past the breaking point. The path forward requires something harder: neighbors of privilege connecting directly with neighbors of difference. Human to human. Not through a program. Through proximity.

Open the Process

We close with a broader challenge.

Vermont's legislative process remains far more accessible to elites, lobbyists, trade associations, and the social services industrial complex than to the marginalized neighbors whose lives hang in the balance. Too many Vermonters are being pushed into intersectional disenfranchisement and impoverishment by the very systems that are supposed to serve them. When only the privileged can afford to show up, the policy outcomes reflect that privilege.

We urge this committee and the full legislature to find innovative ways to open Vermont's legislative process more fully to all community members. Not just those who can afford to testify. Not just those who know how to navigate the system. All of us. The mother in the motel room. The veteran under the bridge. The young person whose entire disability check goes to rent. Their expertise, born of lived experience, is as valuable as any lobbyist's policy memo.



We have to innovate ways to encourage and create opportunities for neighbors of privilege to more directly connect with and care for neighbors of difference. That is the work. It will not be accomplished by making evictions faster.

We ask you to oppose H. 772 in its current form. We ask you to listen to the neighbors it will harm. And we ask you to imagine a Vermont where the legislative process itself reflects the motto sewn into our cultural fabric: *freedom and unity*. For everyone.

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In Faith for Justice,

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Vermont Community Justice Ministry