

Testimony for the 2.18.26 on S. 278 - An act relating to cannabis
Joint Hearing of Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs & House
Government Operations and Military Affairs

Land Access and Opportunity Board

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To Chair Clarkson, Chair Birong and Committee Members,

Wherever we go we ground ourselves in our touchstones

- Listen generously. Speak your truth from your heart & mind.
- Make the way we work together and example of what is possible.
- Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle & we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S.278.

The Land Access and Opportunity Board was created to improve access to woodlands, farmland, and land and home ownership for Vermonters from historically marginalized or disadvantaged communities who continue to face barriers to land and home ownership.

The LAOB was created to help the State of Vermont understand and remove the barriers that disadvantaged communities face in achieving land and home ownership. Our communities face barriers that are the compounding result of generations of unjust and discriminatory laws and practices, including the War on Drugs.

Discriminatory policing of cannabis has undermined our communities' economic stability. Economic instability causes housing instability with damaging impacts for all of us. As the Vermont Department of Health found in its 2024 State Health Assessment:

"Lack of affordable, safe, and accessible housing leads to housing insecurity, mental health deterioration and financial strain. Key housing issues include substandard housing environments due to neglected maintenance, the high cost of housing, a limited number of contractors available to make repairs, landlords raising rents while not maintaining properties, and economic support, policies, and initiatives for affordable housing that are not addressing the acute needs. Housing discrimination further limits access for many marginalized communities."

Since its creation, the Cannabis Control Board has recognized the "disproportionate impact of the historically government-led policies that fueled the economic oppression of Black and Brown people for generations and continues to disadvantage these individuals as well as Indigenous people, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups. The Board aspires to build an equitable and accessible program in order to mitigate the past harm inflicted by the prohibition of cannabis."

However, in its 2024 Act 166 Report, the CCB found that:

"Given the inherent barriers to accessing the industry and the on-going challenges to achieving sustainable success, the CCB and the Cannabis Advisory Committee concluded that the Social

Equity Program alone is inadequate to mitigate the harm caused by historic drug policies and has called for the creation of a community reinvestment fund in prior legislative reports,” and recommended dedicating 25% of the Cannabis Excise Tax to the Land Access and Opportunity board for community reinvestment.

S.278 contains a \$5.6M appropriation for the Land Access and Opportunity Board. The LAOB has done the ground work and is able to deploy these FY27 funds into programs that have been vetted and developed by our communities in collaboration with agencies and service providers.

This appropriation will fund:

- Homes for All Developer Training Program to provide training and early stage financing to beginning and small-scale housing developers
- Community Resilience Awards to support community-led emergency preparedness hubs
- Community Governance Capacity Building and Case Studies to make Vermont’s land access and housing programs more just and equitable
- Secure Housing Coaches to provide and train culturally responsive housing navigation in the state and support an existing gap in the system- a lack of across system coordination and support for case managers.
- Board, staff, and administrative costs

We support the CCB Act 56 Report finding that

“From a public health and prevention lens, directing cannabis excise tax revenues to provide grants and technical assistance for affordable housing, land access, and community-led development would help address upstream determinants of health—stabilizing families, reducing stress and insecurity, and creating safer, more resilient neighborhoods”

[Linked here](#) are details about LAOB’s FY27 programs and priorities. We look forward to connecting with each of you to discuss how the LAOB is serving your constituents.

Land Access and Opportunity Board Touchstones:

1. Listen generously. Speak your truth from your heart & mind.
2. Make the way we work together an example of what's possible.
3. Trust that we all hold a piece of the puzzle & we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture



Land Access Opportunity Board

FY27

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FY27 Budget

FY27 Budget

LAOB Budget	FY27	Notes
Land Access and Opportunity Board FY27 Budget	\$ 3,217,734	
LAOB Staffing and Fringe - 10 FTE	\$ 1,764,302	
LAOB Operating Costs - Staff mileage, staff conferences and travel communications including translation/interpretation, website launch, strategic planning.	\$ 118,232	
LAOB Board Costs - Board member per diems, meeting costs, conference attendance, travel reimbursement	\$ 55,200	
LAOB Programming Costs	\$ 1,280,000	
Homes For All Grant Fund	\$ 400,000	20 Grants up to \$25,000/unit flex capital to advance project readiness for emerging developers
Homes for All Developer Community of Practice	\$ 150,000	Online network platform \$20,000; Network workshops and events: \$30,000
Secure Housing Coaches - Program Supplies	\$ 50,000	Online network platform \$20,000; Network workshops and events: \$30,000
Community Disaster Readiness Grants	\$ 400,000	Grants up to \$50k x at least 8 communities for Resilience and Readiness Tool Kits: equipment, infrastructure, planning
Advisory Powers Work Groups and Collaborative Planning Initiatives	\$ 150,000	Policy problem-solving workshops: Subject matter consultants; meeting costs, supplies
Community Governance Capacity Building Mini-Grants	\$ 130,000	Grants to support civic engagement with public policy processes re: land use and housing

Land Access and Opportunity Board	FY27	FY26
Total	\$ 3,217,734	\$ 1,613,582
Base	\$ 1,784,809	\$ 1,613,582
One Time	\$ 1,432,925	\$ -

Revenue	\$ 3,305,734
Proposed FY27 Appropriation	\$ 3,217,734
SOV Carry Forward	
Contracted Revenue	\$ 68,000
Donations and Fee for Service	\$ 20,000
Net Income/(Loss)	\$ 88,000



FY26 BAA

FY26 Budget Adjustment - \$1M for LAOB to reinstate FY26 grant programs

Homes for All Grant Fund - \$750,000 to support pre-development & seed capital for emerging developers.

Community Resilience Hub Grants - \$250,000 to support 5 additional Community Resilience Hub Awards. See [Community Resilience Hub Toolkit | Built by Vermont Flood Survivors](#)



What is the Land Access and Opportunity Board?
(LAOB)

Act 182, 2022

10 V.S.A. § 325u (a) Creation.

There is created the Vermont Land Access and Opportunity Board to promote improvements in access to woodlands, farmland, and land and home ownership for Vermonters from historically marginalized or disadvantaged communities who continue to face barriers to land and home ownership.

Act 182, 2022

10 V.S.A. § 325u (f) Powers and duties of the Board.

LAOB has Advisory Powers → SOV and affiliated institutions

- Retain experts from disadvantaged communities
- Put data at the center of policy and program analysis
- Develop strategies to overcome structural barriers

LAOB has Grant Making Powers → marginalized communities & individuals

- Improve access to land, housing, safety, sustainability and health

LAOB Appointing Authorities

Vermont Office of Racial Equity

Vermont Every Town Project

Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs

National Association of Social Workers, VT

Vermont Branches of the NAACP

Pride Center of Vermont

Vermont Racial Justice Alliance

U.S. Committee for Refugees & Immigrants, VT

Liberation Ecosystem

Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

Migrant Justice

Vermont Psychiatric Survivors



LAOB Programs

Program Update

- Community Resilience Hubs
- Beginning Developer Training Program
- Shelter for All
- Secure Housing Coach Program
- Advisory Powers

Community Resilience Hubs

Community Resilience Hub Grants

FY26 - \$350,000 *secure*

FY26 BAA - \$250,000 *pending*

FY27 - \$400,000 *pending*

Grants support

- Community-led disaster resilience
- Emergency Shelter that is led and informed by marginalized communities
- Network of community resilience hubs



**A guide to inspire people-centered
resilience in Vermont amid
chronic and acute disaster**

*The Resilience Hub Toolkit resiliencetoolkit.org
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What is resilience?

Resilience is the ability of a community to survive, respond, and adapt to disaster with an orientation towards thriving conditions. We recognize that both acute and everyday disasters are conditions that demand increased community resilience.

- Everyday disasters shape our world—the rising cost of food, climate disruption, political volatility, housing disparities and more
- Built upon a belief that people who are closest to problems are closest to solutions

Built With Grassroots Partners In collaboration with frontline responders, community organizers, and mutual aid networks across Vermont:

Access Ecologies
Community Resilience Organizations
(CROs)
Community Resilience for the
Waterbury Area (CReW)
Cooperation Vermont
Lamoille Area Recovery Network
(LeARN)

Land Access and Opportunity Board
(LAOB)
Kingdom United Resilience and
Recovery Effort (KURRVE)
Northeast Kingdom Organizing
(NEKO)
Rose Core Collective
Rural Vermont

Local News

New online 'toolkit' offers Vermonters a how-to for disaster recovery

Vermont Public | By [Peter Hirschfeld](#)
Published December 26, 2025 at 5:00 AM EST



“A devastating flood just struck your community. Neighbors’ homes are underwater. Roads are washed out.

You want to help. But what exactly do you do?

A [new online manual](#) provides some of the answers.

A spokesperson at Vermont Emergency Management said the toolkit has the state’s endorsement.

“This is a good resource for communities and individuals,” said Mark Bosma, the public information officer at VEM. “The more places it lives, the better.””

Beginning Developer Training Program

Beginning Developer Training Program

Homes for All Phase 2

- Community of Practice for beginning developers
- 1:1 Technical Assistance
- Pre-development Seed Grants

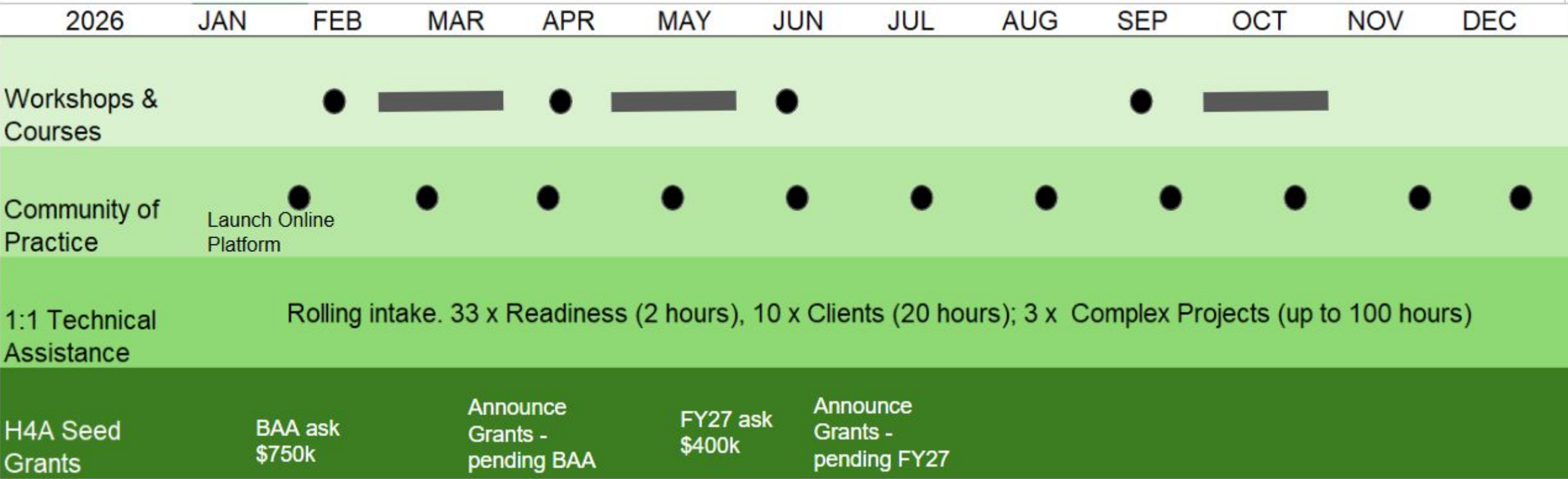
Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative Supply Side Development

Why Support Beginning Developers?

We need as many as 36,000 new homes built by 2029, doubling the current pace of production from 3,500/yr to 7,500/yr. How are we going to get all these homes built?

- A lot of Vermonters want to roll of their sleeves and build
- Who builds matters - diverse developers create a diversity of housing opportunities
- Construction is expensive and risky, especially if you don't know the pitfalls
- Technical assistance and peer support new and beginning developers to secure financing and start building homes

Homes for All Phase 2 Timeline



Vision of Success - In one year, we will see...

Emerging Developers

- Socializing, sharing tips on construction/development process
- Engagement with local zoning/housing groups
- ROC (return on community) is included in goal of ROI
- Increase in contractor registrations
- Participants break ground on a project
- More underrepresented folx approved for development loans
- Lots of new projects queued up for 2027 construction
- More people want to be trained

My Organization (and me!)

- Real connection on the nitty gritty of building housing
- Local ecosystem development with strong state support
- Develop a suite of tools & resources to support emerging developers
- We grow in how we support developers
- We see new homes completed
- Leveraged capital
- We have something to be proud of - a claim to fame

Vermont Communities

- New housing that fits in seamlessly
- Underutilized properties being redeveloped
- More housing units brought online using existing structures
- Don't see all development as bad; new homes = more stability
- Increase in permit applications & approvals
- Increased community resilience & health
- Stronger community bonds
- Communities are open to infill development

Policy Makers

- Streamlined Zoning
- Modernized Zoning
- Innovations & process improvements
- Lessons learned
- Longer term/low-barrier funding is available for pre-development grants
- Credibility earned by doing something Vermonters love

People experiencing housing insecurity

- More housing options
- Opportunity to gain skills & credibility to build the housing that meets unique needs
- More folks feel housing is accessible. Stability = safety

Who else will be impacted?

- People who want to stay in their towns will have that option
- Viable career paths for non-college track Vermonters

Shelter For All

LAOB Shelter For All Committee Sept 2024-Jan 2026

- Observing & Reflecting on how the existing shelter system promotes and/or prevents land access and opportunity for unhoused people. Where can LAOB contribute more capacity?
- Community engagement - SFA public meetings in the park, welcoming impacting community members into committee meetings
- 2024 Housing Conference Case Study on Shelter
- Tents - emergency shelter
 - Everyone Sleeps
- Advisory Powers Grant - End Homelessness Vermont
- LAOB Emergency Access to Land and Opportunity Guidelines
- Emergency Shelter Grants to 8 shelters: Bennington, Brattleboro, Middlebury, Rutland (2), Colchester/Chittenden Co, Burlington (2),
- Resilience Hubs and Grants
- Beginning Developer Community of Practice - Shelter and Transitional Housing Affinity Group (Homes for All Developer Training)
- *in development* - Truth telling sessions for unhoused Vermonters + additional case studies to promote community owned solutions

Secure Housing Coach Program

Secure Housing Coaching Program

- Housing navigation continues to be identified as a priority tool for improving secure housing for Vermonters. Housing navigation includes:
 - Awareness of programs
 - Ability to access programs
 - Coordination between service providers for better outcomes
- Partnership with State Health Improvement Plan - LAOB created a catalog of all Housing and Land Access programs and resources in Vermont.
- Four Housing Navigation Coaches hired to provide direct services to LAOB communities
- Community of Practice - Capacity building and peer support to reduce burnout among direct service providers



How We Work

LAOB is working with....

Legislative Working Groups

- Act 181 / Act 250 Rulemaking - Tier 3, Appeals, Criterion 8C
- Vermont Evaluation of Rural Technical Assistance
- Act 59 - Technical Advisory Committee
- Cannabis Control Board Report
- Land Bank Working Group

Community Collaborators

- Developmental Disability Housing Initiative
- Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont
- Food Security Roadmap Coalition
- Community Resilience Organizations
- Rural Vermont
- Farm Bureau
- Cannabis Equity Coalition
- VT Community Loan Fund
- Lets Build Homes
- Vermont Chamber of Commerce
- plus hundreds of Vermonters

LAOB Advisory Powers Contracts

- VT Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets
- VT Department of Health
- VT Natural Resource Council - Smarter Growth Summit
- Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission
- Middlebury College - Senior Projects on Environmental Policy
- VT Housing and Conservation Board
- VT Housing Finance Agency
- VT Community Foundation

Our Board

- Liberation Ecosystem
- Migrant Justice
- NAACP
- Pride Center of Vermont
- US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
- VT Every Town Project
- VT Racial Justice Alliance
- National Association of Social Workers, VT Chapter
- VT Psychiatric Survivors
- VT Commission of Native American Affairs
- VT Developmental Disabilities Council
- Vermont Office of Racial Equity

Our Values - this is how we work

- Our touchstones.
- Vision: We can create the world we all want to live in.
- Our shared humanity: everyone wants to be seen, to be valued, to feel dignity, and to have agency over their lives.
- Trust: acknowledge best intentions and shared limitations.
- Honesty: Continuous improvement relies on being honest about what is not working well.
- Community: we create better outcomes when we work together.
- **Creativity and Resourcefulness: What do we have when we don't have enough money?**

What are the problems we see?

- Affordability & prosperity rely on us unlocking the power of our people and community-led solutions - **What do we have when we don't have enough money?**
- Vermont needs more people power: families, workers, participation in public processes.
- Disconnect between public institutions and the people they are supposed to serve.
- Silos and false objectives prevent us from working together to understand the real problems and create innovative solutions.
- Compounding crises are threatening our communities materially and psychologically.
- Those who are most vulnerable are hit hardest by all crises.
- The lack of effective solutions is inefficient, expensive & demoralizing.
- We need focus on our people.

Effective Community Engagement is a policy making innovation that builds civic and community capacity

We need to work **collaboratively** across Vermont's governing processes to structurally improve public engagement and input processes to

- Be inclusive of all perspectives
- Adequately resource community participation, facilitation that encourages sharing diverse ideas, and skillful & data-driven meaning-making
- Build community trust
- Create momentum for efficient and effective policy implementation

We have the building blocks. Now lets work together to make it happen.

Vermont Environmental Justice Law - Act 154

§ 6004. Implementation of State policy (c) **Each of the covered** engage with environmental justice focus populations as it evaluates new and existing activities and programs. Community engagement plans shall align with the core principles developed by the Interagency Environmental Justice Committee pursuant to subdivision 6006(c)(2)(B) of this title and take into consideration the recommendations of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council pursuant to subdivision 6006(c)(1)(B) of this title. **agencies shall create and adopt on or before July 1, 2027 a community engagement plan** that describes how the agency will Each plan shall describe how the agency plans to provide meaningful participation in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



What has LAOB achieved?

<p>Act 2022 creates LAOB</p> <p>\$200,000 appropriated - one time</p>	<p>Sunrise Report submitted</p> <p>\$1.2M appropriated - one time</p>	<p>\$1M appropriated - one time</p>	<p>\$1.63M appropriated - base</p> <p>\$1M reverted</p>
2022	2023	2024	2025
<p>LAOB convened by ORE</p>	<p>LAOB Priority Objectives Adopted</p>	<p>MOU signed with VHCB for administrative services</p> <p>2 Co-Directors Hired</p> <p>Program Research Systems Resource Mapping Working Groups & Advisory Powers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Priority Housing Projects ● CCB - 166 ● Act 59 ● DDHI ● Community Resilience 	<p>3 Staff Hired</p> <p>Program Development Community Activation Working Groups & Advisory Powers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● FLU maps ● LURB rulemaking ● VERTA ● Land Banks ● Smarter Growth ● Act 59 ● Food Land ● Community Resilience

Policy Recommendations

Culture of Agriculture - Right to Grow Food

- We must protect peoples' rights to grow food for themselves and their neighbors

Act 181/Act 250

- Delay implementation of Act 181 & direct the LURB to assess and develop mitigation plan for economic and environmental justice impacts of Act 181 and Act 250
- Tier 1 concerns
 - Community capacity to manage permitting
 - Risk for exclusionary participation
- Tier 3, Road Rule, and Criterion 8C concerns
 - Impacts on rural communities vs impacts on growth areas/downtowns

Land security - Housing security & Food security

- Map strategic community food lands
- Every Vermonter must have walkable access to a place to grow food

Meaningfully address civic capacity gaps

- [VERTA report](#) → address the critical lack of civic capacity
- Fund [Community Resilience Hubs](#)

Act 69

- Disabilities Housing: [Listen to the people](#) closest to the problems.

Invest in the LAOB

- What do we do have when we don't have enough money → [better problem solving](#)

Discussion & Questions

