

February 13, 2026

House Committee on Human Services
Vermont General Assembly
Montpelier, Vermont

Re: DR 26-0766 – Emergency Housing Services and Municipal Partnership

Dear Chair Wood and Members of the Committee:

I am joined by four other Vermont Mayors from across the state to offer strong support of legislative action to address the State's escalating homelessness crisis and to **respectfully request that the next draft of DR 26-0766 include clear, sufficient resources for municipalities** that are being called upon to respond to homelessness, particularly unsheltered homelessness.

Our communities are currently experiencing an unprecedented level of homelessness that has turned into a humanitarian crisis. Recent dramatic increases have been directly linked to reductions in shelter capacity, particularly through changes to the motel program, and an overall lack of available shelter statewide, especially low-barrier shelters.

Municipal governments have thus become the providers of last resort, shouldering the costs and responsibilities of emergency shelters, outreach, and public safety responses. As a result, municipalities require—and deserve—greater State funding to meet this urgent need and to support coordinated, sustainable solutions for our unhoused residents.

Based on HUD's 2024 data, Vermont ranked 4th in the nation in terms of per-capita rates of homelessness, affecting an estimated 53 people per 10,000 Vermonters. Vermont's total homelessness count has increased significantly since the pandemic, with more than a 200% rise in overall Point in Time (PIT) count figures between 2020 and recent years. Advocates have sounded the alarm on **a sharp increase in unsheltered homelessness in 2025**, with the unsheltered count rising to around 270 people in the 2025 PIT — nearly a **63% increase compared with the 2024 PIT profile**.

Municipalities across Vermont are experiencing firsthand the operational, fiscal, and social consequences of rising homelessness. As unsheltered homelessness has grown dramatically in recent years, cities and towns have become the providers of last resort—operating emergency cold weather shelters, funding daytime resource centers, managing encampments, and responding to increased 911 calls related to medical crises, mental

health emergencies, overdoses, and public safety concerns. These are not traditional municipal functions, yet local **governments are absorbing the costs** through overtime, public works deployments, emergency management coordination, and strain on first responders. Without clear, adequate state funding to support municipal involvement in emergency housing services, the burden shifts to local property taxpayers and overstretched municipal staff, making an already urgent crisis more difficult and more expensive to manage.

We understand that § 2205 of the bill is intended to provide financial aid to municipalities to ensure equitable access to shelter during National Weather Service-declared cold weather advisories, and that the committee has sought to draft this section with flexibility. We appreciate that intent and agree that municipalities must see themselves in this bill.

However, as currently drafted, **the bill does not yet clearly provide sufficient or structured resources to support the real costs municipalities are incurring in operating emergency shelter, nor does it address the broader municipal response infrastructure that has become necessary to address homelessness.** While we understand that the committee has not yet taken up the appropriations section, it is essential that the final bill include dedicated, adequate funding for municipal emergency shelter operations and associated emergency management activities.

We recognize and appreciate the committee's clear statement that this bill is focused on lifesaving, time-limited shelter and is not intended to supplant core municipal services. At the same time, the operational reality is that when individuals are unsheltered, municipalities bear the direct impacts on emergency services, public works, public health, and community safety. Any effective emergency housing framework must acknowledge and resource that role.

We respectfully request that the next draft of DR 26-0766:

1. Include explicit, adequate appropriations for municipal emergency shelter operations during cold weather advisories;
2. Ensure sufficient flexibility in eligible uses so municipalities can meet local needs while maintaining accountability; and
3. Clarify how municipal emergency management activities connected to shelter operations may be supported.

We urge the Committee to hear directly from municipal leaders as you refine this section to ensure a balance of flexibility and specificity allowing communities to operate effectively.

The scale of unsheltered homelessness has outpaced local capacity. **Municipal governments cannot continue to absorb expanding responsibilities without corresponding resources.** We stand ready to partner with you on durable solutions, but we cannot do so alone.

Thank you for your leadership and for your attention to the urgent needs facing our communities.

Respectfully,

Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, Mayor of Burlington

Thomas Renner, Mayor of Winooski

Rick Ufford-Chase, Mayor of Newport

Jack McCullough, Mayor of Montpelier

Mike Doenges, Mayor of Rutland

Enclosure: Statement from Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak / Burlington, Vermont

Statement from Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak / Burlington, Vermont

Burlington continues to experience significant pressures from the state's homelessness crisis. Rates of homelessness in Chittenden County roughly tripled from 2022 to 2025. Recent data indicates that at least 200 people are sleeping outside at any given time in the Burlington area — and this is expected to be an undercount.

In response, the City has stepped forward to fill critical gaps in the safety net. In partnership with the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO), Burlington opens and operates an extreme cold weather shelter at a -10-degree threshold. So far this winter, the shelter has opened for twelve nights, serving 239 unique individuals across 773 bed nights — a substantial number of people over just 12 activations. This past weekend alone, the shelter served 87 guests in a single night, an all-time high. The acuity of medical, mental health, and substance use needs among those sleeping outside underscores that this is not simply a housing issue — it is a life-safety and public health crisis.

In addition to overnight shelter, daytime warming and resource centers have become essential infrastructure. Amid the historic and ongoing homelessness crisis in Chittenden County, CVOEO's Community Resource Center (CRC) in Burlington has become a cornerstone of the region's public safety, public health, and housing response system. The CRC serves an average of 131 individuals per day, more than half of whom are unsheltered. In the past year alone, staff served 2,152 unique individuals, provided more than 36,000 meals, and supported 168 people in transitioning from homelessness to shelter or permanent housing.

With municipal support, the CRC has expanded to weekend hours during the winter — a critical step given the scarcity of indoor daytime options for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Without spaces like the CRC, individuals are left with few safe alternatives during Vermont's harsh winter conditions, increasing pressure on municipalities, first responders, libraries, and hospital emergency departments.

The state's homelessness crisis is therefore not only a housing and human services challenge; it is also straining our healthcare infrastructure. Vermont's only Level I trauma center at the University of Vermont Medical Center is experiencing rising patient volumes in its emergency department, in part because individuals without stable housing often rely on hospitals for care that could be more safely and effectively addressed in community settings. At times, particularly in winter, the emergency department becomes one of the

only warm, safe places available. This dynamic contributes to overcrowding and resource strain in a system already operating near capacity.

In sum, Burlington and its local partners continue to shoulder substantial operational, public safety, and public health costs to protect vulnerable residents and maintain community stability.