

**TO: House Human Services Committee**

**RE: Testimony on H 534**

**Submitted by: Joshua Davis, Executive Director, Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA) & Vermont Community Action Partnership (VCAP)**

**Date: January 10, 2026**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.534, which proposes updates to state statute language related to Vermont's Community Action Agencies.

My name is Joshua Davis, and I serve as the Executive Director of Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA). I am also here representing the Vermont Community Action Partnership (VCAP). I am pleased to share that VCAP is unanimously in favor of the changes proposed in H.534.

#### **Overview of Proposed Updates**

In general, the proposed updates in H.534 are focused on modernization, clarity, and alignment with current standards and practices. Many changes are technical and reflect widely accepted language and framing used in the Community Action network in Vermont and nationally.

#### **Key Updates**

##### **1. Modernized and consistent terminology**

H.534 updates terminology in statute to reflect current naming conventions—for example, shifting from “community services agencies” to “community action agencies.” This change aligns Vermont statute with the common and appropriate language used across our field.

##### **2. People-first language**

The bill updates statutory language to reflect people-first framing, such as referring to an “individual with low income.” VCAP supports this change as an important modernization that reflects dignity and respect for the people Community Action Agencies serve.

##### **3. Clarifying planning expectations (pg. 5)**

The bill references annual work plans and strategic planning requirements. Community Action Agencies already comply with planning requirements through the Vermont Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO). SEVCA submits an annual work plan to OEO, and we interpret the statute language as consistent with this existing process—not as superseding those requirements.

Additionally, we understand the bill’s reference to strategic planning to align with the established expectation that Community Action Agencies maintain a strategic plan informed by the Community Needs Assessment, which is conducted every three years.

## Board Term Limit Provision

The most significant policy change within the bill is the proposed removal of statutory language limiting board service to a maximum of ten years.

Speaking for SEVCA, we support removing board term limits from statute. We believe board term limits are better governed at the local level through each Community Action Agency's bylaws, rather than being standardized in law. Each agency should retain flexibility to align board governance with local community needs, recruitment realities, and organizational continuity.

At SEVCA, we support a 12-year maximum board term limit, but we do not believe this type of requirement should be set in statute.

## Conclusion

In summary, VCAP unanimously supports H.534. The bill modernizes statutory language, improves clarity, aligns Vermont law with people-first and current field standards, and appropriately restores local governance discretion regarding board term limits.

Thank you for your consideration of this legislation and for the opportunity to submit testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Joshua Davis  
Executive Director  
Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)