



Written Testimony – Response to H.594 / Homelessness

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Thank you to the committee for continuing to address homelessness in Vermont and for the opportunity to share the Vermont Network's response to H.594 as introduced.

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is the leading statewide voice on issues of domestic and sexual violence. Our coalition represents 14 independent, non-profit member organizations. In 2025, these organizations answered over 23,000 hotline calls from Vermonters seeking resources and support related to domestic and sexual violence and provided emergency shelter to 1,041 people fleeing violence across our state. Together, our member organizations serve every town in Vermont, including supporting survivors fleeing violence with shelter, motel overflow, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and accessing the General Assistance Emergency Housing program.

The Vermont Network is a member of the Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont and has been in close communication with emergency and temporary housing providers. Alongside these partners, we support a person-centered approach to preventing and ending homelessness. Changes to Vermont's temporary and emergency shelter system must consider the needs of survivors, a distinct population with unique needs, systems of care, and federal laws and policies that dictate how these organizations provide shelter and case management.

Overview of the Vermont Network's Current Homelessness Services

Thank you to the House Committee on Human Services for your support last year of the establishment of a grant to service victims of domestic and sexual violence within the Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP).

In SFY26, the Vermont Network began its role as the statewide DV/SV administrator for HOP funding. The Vermont Network received \$4,438,950 in funding. From the total award, \$3,929,079 (89%) is then sub-granted to eight member organizations that operate 13 physical shelters for survivors of domestic and sexual violence. These awards include funding for shelter operations, motel (shelter overflow) funding, and essential services. The remaining funds support a statewide financial assistance program that we operate, support a separate, confidential and HMIS compliant database used by our Member Organizations to track clients served and provide some limited administrative resources.

Under this grant agreement, the Vermont Network is tasked with the financial and programmatic monitoring of subgrantees, as well as providing specialized training and technical assistance to shelter



programs. We are also currently working with the Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to transition to a statewide DV/SV shelter overflow pool. This will ensure that survivors in every community in the state can access emergency stays when their local domestic violence shelter is at capacity or when a shelter is not an appropriate setting for their needs.

We work closely with OEO on this transition and will continue to do so. This close partnership is essential to the program's success. This new arrangement provides mutual benefit. The State of Vermont has one grantee to monitor and support – rather than nine individual grantees. Subgrantees of the Vermont Network work with us directly to access technical assistance and training, ensuring that services for victims of domestic and sexual violence are consistent across the state.

We highly recommend that the funding and framework of the program continue into the future. We support codifying this framework into law, as was contemplated in H. 91 last year.

Comments on H.594 as introduced

We appreciate the Committee's continued work to strengthen, improve and find efficiencies within Vermont's shelter and homelessness services sector. We also understand that H. 594 is currently under review and will likely be modified by the committee substantially in the coming week. ***We offer the comments and requests below and would welcome the opportunity to testify on any future drafts.***

Requested Amendments

The Vermont Network serves survivors of both domestic and sexual violence, as well as survivors of human trafficking. Therefore, we request the following amendments:

- Sec. 2 (16) - Definitions
 - (16) "Survivor of domestic and sexual violence" means an individual who has experienced domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking and who is seeking emergency housing to avoid further harm or abuse.
- Sec. 3 Temporary Emergency Housing and Accountability Program
 - (a)(4), (b)(1)(A), and (b)(2)(B) - the section's references of mandatory case management

Voluntary services are a requirement of the federal Violence Against Women Act and the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act statutes. Voluntary means ***survivors cannot be mandated*** to participate in supportive services and no conditions can be placed on survivors of domestic and sexual violence in order to access or continue receiving emergency shelter. This requirement



mandates a unique and voluntary approach to services by domestic and sexual violence providers. Consolidating funding and approaches to services under a regional services organization could ***jeopardize the federal funding our Member Organizations receive.***

(e) Prioritization. The tiered continuum of care established in subsection (b) of this section shall prioritize eligible individuals and eligible households that meet multiple vulnerability criteria, including disability, age, chronic 19 homelessness, and domestic and sexual violence status.

- Sec. 9 Domestic Violence Housing

We are grateful for the section specific to Domestic Violence Housing and attention to not holding a hotel and motel room limit for those experiencing domestic and sexual violence. We do ask for the following amendment:

(a) Domestic and sexual violence survivors shall be served ~~through a program 5 administered with Vermont domestic and sexual violence organizations under 6 contract with the Department by a statewide entity servicing victims of domestic and sexual violence under contract with the Department~~ that is separate from the Temporary Emergency 7 Housing and Accountability Program.

- Sec. 15 Reports

The Vermont Network reports to OEO on 13 separate and consolidated data points every quarter for the block grant on Shelter Operations and Essential Services. We request that any new reports take into consideration existing reporting and the reality that additional reports may be duplicative and cost service providers and clients additional time that could be used to engage in providing services and finding permanent housing.

- Sec. 16 Return Home Program

(a)(3)(B) vulnerable populations, including ~~victims~~ survivors of domestic and sexual violence or human trafficking, are not involuntarily displaced and participation is strictly voluntary;

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee throughout the session.