

Norman Createau Jr. Testimony House Human Services H. 594

Good Morning, for the record I am Norman Croteau Jr. I currently live in Colchester. I want to start by saying that I do not normally do public speaking, but, I am going out on a limb because I feel like information should be told despite the fact that I don't really do this. We are not really public people.

I am sheltered at Motel 6. My Partner lives with complex needs. She has a lot of chronic health conditions and mobility issues.

I became homeless by no fault of my own. I was living in an apartment and my landlord decided that he was selling his property and we were evicted for No Cause. He actually sold multiple buildings full of many households and all people living in them got No Cause Evictions. I can't even imagine how many people became homeless because of this. We knew these people, they were good people, they took care of their homes and they, like us, ended up homeless.

In the beginning of our experience of homelessness, we were bounced around a lot. We have had no where to live for 4 years. We have applied for every apartment, we have stayed connected to services and we continue to keep up with our medical providers.

This past spring we were denied Medical Vulnerability under the Governor's Executive order and I don't know what we would have done if we had not found End Homelessness Vermont. We are fully engaged with CVOEO and they referred us to EHVT and we were able to get through a fair hearing to remain sheltered under the Governor's Executive Order, but in June we found out that our 80 days were used under the Governor's waiver. So we were evicted to the street. We had to go through another fair hearing, and ultimately it was found that the law allowed for us to have 80 days after July 1st. But that took a long time and we were outside until November. During that time, my partner's health conditions got much worse. She was not doing well at all when we first got inside. She had to go to the hospital actually. That could have been prevented. I can't imagine how expensive her recovery was, but it had to have been more than if we had just been able to stay sheltered.

The fact of having to camp that way, made it worse. We had to camp places that were not allowed and we were forced to do that.

When we got back inside, we had to get a reasonable accommodation to be sheltered at Motel 6. Where there are elevators and accessible rooms and people who treat you like you matter. The staff are attentive and supportive and we have services both with both End Homelessness Vermont and CVOEO, as well as medical providers.

We live entirely on my disability which is just about \$1200, that means that we can not afford an apartment in this market without some kind of subsidy. And we have been turned down for subsidized apartments because of our no cause eviction. We are waiting on an appeal which both my caseworker at CVOEO and EHVT are willing to attend.

There is absolutely no way we could go through all of this alone. Absolutely no way. We have never refused services or turned them down. But every step of this has been complicated and hard to navigate. And we feel like we are being judged at every corner.

Living in GA Emergency Housing is not luxury. It is not that easy and the system is very hard to get into. We are using a dorm room fridge. Our whole lives are packed into one space and we are constantly being told that we are going to have to go outside again and that is traumatizing. This program is keeping us alive

I feel like when I read articles or see the news. The people in charge have no clue what it is like to be homeless. We are talked about with complete disregard. We know what we need. We are doing everything we can to end up housed.

My partner also can't hear, she did not have the tools to even get into the program because we have to use a phone line and we don't have the means of transportation. I also have disabilities. We needed support to get through this process and to communicate and understand the renewal and voucher process. It is not a simple process. It is complicated. Please don't make it more complicated.

Whatever program you make please make sure that people experiencing homelessness do not end up living outside. It doesn't help us and it makes us sick. It would make anybody sick. We have made friends in the hotels, it is not unsafe and it is not isolating. What is isolating is when you are forced to live out in the woods. When you are in the hotels you do end up having a sense of a community. I keep seeing in the news that that is not understood. So, I want you all to know that we do have community and we are not isolated here and we do have services.

The state doesn't talk about the positive things that the homeless community does when we pull together. If it wasn't for other homeless people helping us, we would have been freezing and starved. People got us food and water. And in the hotels we help each other too. And I don't know any of us, anyone that I have met, who is just comfortable in the hotels. We are all trying to get housed. You don't have to add requirements to make us do that. Everyone wants that and we all do what we can to make it happen.

Please make sure you don't create a program that leaves us unsheltered. That adds hurdles or requirements. Or that forces us to live on cots with many other people in the same room. That is not dignity. And please do not force us to live only with other people with complex needs. Just because we have disabilities does not mean we should be isolated away from everyone else.

I thank you so much for the chance to testify today. I hope that my story helps shape whatever you do next.

Please let us be seen by our souls, not just by our challenges.