

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Health and Welfare to which was referred House Bill
3 No. 91 entitled “An act relating to the Vermont Homeless Emergency
4 Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program” respectfully
5 reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the Senate
6 propose to the House that the bill be amended by striking out all after the
7 enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

8 * * * Findings and Legislative Intent * * *

9 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

10 The General Assembly finds that:

11 (1) according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
12 Development’s 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, Vermont had
13 the fourth highest rate of homelessness in 2024 in that 53 of every 10,000
14 Vermonters are experiencing homelessness, with only Hawaii, New York, and
15 Oregon experiencing higher rates;

16 (2) in 2023, according to the same Annual Homelessness Assessment
17 Report, 51 of every 10,000 Vermonters were experiencing homelessness;

18 (3) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, there were
19 approximately 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont, which represents a 300
20 percent increase over the 1,110 unhoused individuals prior to the COVID-19
21 pandemic in 2020;

1 (4) of the 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont identified by the
2 Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 166 experienced unsheltered
3 homelessness, which is the highest count of unsheltered homeless individuals
4 in Vermont within the past decade;

5 (5) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, over 35
6 percent of those Vermonters experiencing homelessness were unhoused for
7 more than one year and over 72 percent were unhoused for more than 90 days;

8 (6) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 737 of those
9 Vermonters experiencing homelessness were children and youth under 18
10 years of age and 646 were 55 years of age or older;

11 (7) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, Black
12 Vermonters are 5.6 times more likely to be unhoused as compared to white
13 Vermonters;

14 (8) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that 36,000
15 primary homes are needed in Vermont between 2025–2029, 3,295 of which are
16 needed to address homelessness;

17 (9) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that “[h]alf of
18 all Vermont renters are cost-burdened, and one-in-four pay more than 50
19 [percent] of their income on housing costs, putting them at high risk of
20 eviction,” which “is heightened by Vermont’s rental vacancy rate of 3
21 [percent], which is well below the 5 [percent] rate of a healthy market”; and

1 (10) since 2020, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board has
2 constructed 170 new single-family homeownership units and 269 new shelter
3 beds.

4 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

5 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that unsheltered homelessness
6 be eliminated and that homelessness in Vermont be rare, brief, and
7 nonrecurring.

8 (b) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Vermont Homeless
9 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
10 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is a step toward ensuring that:

11 (1) homelessness be reduced in Vermont and interim shelter
12 opportunities be available to provide a stable pathway to permanent housing
13 for all Vermonters experiencing homelessness, including safe shelter options
14 for individuals living in unsheltered homelessness;

15 (2) Vermont increase the supply of emergency shelter as well as
16 permanent supportive housing that meets the specific needs of individuals;

17 (3) community components of all shelter types are integrated in a
18 systemic manner;

19 (4) time limits, night-by-night shelter, relocation between interim shelter
20 sites, and other disruptions in housing stability be eliminated to the extent
21 possible;

1 (5) Vermont’s emergency housing statutes, rules, policies, procedures,
2 and practices be modeled on Housing First principles where appropriate;

3 (6) noncongregate shelter be used to the extent possible; and

4 (7) Vermont reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel
5 rooms to shelter participating households and expand the use of emergency
6 shelters throughout the State for this purpose.

7 (c) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Vermont Homeless
8 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
9 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 replaces the provision of emergency
10 housing through the General Assistance Program established in 33 V.S.A.
11 chapter 21 beginning in fiscal year 2027 and the Housing Opportunity Grant
12 Program beginning in fiscal year 2028.

13 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
14 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2025 * * *

15 Sec. 3. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is added to read:

16 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
17 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

18 § 2201. SHORT TITLE

19 The Program established in this chapter may be cited as “VHEARTH” or
20 the “VHEARTH Program.”

21 § 2202. PURPOSE

1 It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

2 (1) replace the provision of emergency housing through the General
3 Assistance Program established in chapter 21 of this title and use funds and
4 resources previously attributed to this program, and any other identified State
5 and federal monies, to fund the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
6 Responsive Transition to Housing Program established in this chapter;

7 (2) reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel rooms to
8 shelter participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters
9 throughout the State for this purpose; and

10 (3) assist in maintaining housing for households at-risk of homelessness
11 and transition households experiencing homelessness to permanent housing.

12 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

13 As used in this chapter:

14 (1) “At-risk of homelessness” means precariously housed without
15 sufficient income, resources, or support to prevent homelessness.

16 (2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant
17 to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59.

18 (3) “Community-based shelter” means a shelter that meets the
19 Department’s standards for the operation of shelters.

20 (4) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

1 (5) “Extreme weather event” means extreme hot or cold temperatures or
2 weather events, such as hurricanes, flooding, or blizzards, that create
3 hazardous conditions for outdoor habitation by humans.

4 (6) “Homeless” means:

5 (A) lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

6 (B) facing imminent loss of primary nighttime residence;

7 (C) fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence; or

8 (D) otherwise defined as homeless under federal law.

9 (7) “Household” means an individual and any dependents for whom the
10 individual is legally responsible who are domiciled in Vermont as evidenced
11 by an intent to dwell in Vermont and to return to Vermont if temporarily
12 absent, coupled with an act or acts consistent with that intent. “Household”
13 includes individuals who reside together as one economic unit, including those
14 who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

15 (8) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not
16 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation.

17 § 2204. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

18 (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory
19 council whose membership reflects, to the extent possible, the growing
20 diversity among Vermonters, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous,
21 and Persons of Color, as well as with regards to socioeconomic status,

1 geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status. Members of
2 an advisory council shall include organizations providing services in the
3 region, the Department, and representatives of the Agency and each
4 department of the Agency, as needed. A regional advisory council may
5 collaborate with individuals with lived experience of homelessness,
6 community partners, State partners, housing providers, local housing
7 coalitions, statewide homelessness organizations, providers of coordinated
8 entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and municipalities in the
9 region served by the community action agency.

10 (b) Each regional advisory council shall provide advice and
11 recommendations to the community action agency in its region regarding the
12 design and implementation of the Program. The work of each regional
13 advisory council shall be informed by regional planning commissions' housing
14 targets.

15 (c) Each regional advisory council shall meet on at least a quarterly basis.

16 (d) The regional advisory councils shall have the legal and technical
17 support of the Department.

18 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to

19 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2026 * * *

1 Sec. 4. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is amended to read:

2 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
3 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

4 * * *

5 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

6 As used in this chapter:

7 * * *

8 (2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant
9 to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 or the entity or entities otherwise authorized by the
10 Department pursuant to section 2205 of this chapter to fulfill the duties of a
11 community action agency under this chapter.

12 * * *

13 § 2204. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY
14 ASSISTANCE AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING
15 PROGRAM

16 The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition
17 to Housing Program is established in the Department to provide services to
18 households that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, to the extent
19 funds exist.

20 (1) The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a
21 statewide organization that has population-specific service experience to

1 provide or cause to be provided supportive services and shelter to those
2 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
3 violence.

4 (2) All other participating households shall be served by or through a
5 community action agency responsible for a geographically distinct region of
6 the State. Community action agencies participating in the Program shall
7 provide or cause to be provided supportive services, extreme weather event
8 shelter, and emergency shelter.

9 § 2205. AUTHORIZATION PROCESS; REAUTHORIZATION REVIEW

10 (a) The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a
11 statewide organization to provide or cause to be provided supportive services
12 and shelter to those households that are experiencing or that have experienced
13 domestic or sexual violence. The Department shall conduct regular reviews of
14 the statewide organization to ensure compliance with this chapter. The
15 statewide organization may be subject to corrective actions by the Department
16 if, within the constraint of appropriated resources, it no longer meets the
17 requirements of this chapter or has failed to adequately meet the needs of
18 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
19 violence. If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities under
20 this chapter, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that there
21 is not a gap in services.

1 **(b)(1)** The Department shall authorize a community action agency to serve
2 or cause to be served households that are homeless or at risk of becoming
3 homeless in a geographically distinct region of the State if it meets the criteria
4 in this section. If a community action agency cannot fulfill its responsibilities
5 under this chapter, the Department shall work with other community action
6 agencies or other appropriate community entities to ensure that there is not a
7 gap in services in a community action agency's region.

8 **(2)** A community action agency providing or causing to provide services
9 in accordance with this chapter shall have:

10 **(A)** existing or planned infrastructure to support households in the
11 region, including an established leadership team, a human resources staff, and
12 the ability to receive grant funding and issue subgrants;

13 **(B)** the ability to meet the Department's reporting requirements,
14 including having a past history of reporting compliance;

15 **(C)** the capacity to perform the core services required pursuant to
16 section 2206 of this chapter;

17 **(D)** the capacity to seek and accept charitable contributions, grants,
18 and services of volunteers, including money, clothing, and furniture;

19 **(E)** any outcome measures established in this chapter;

20 **(F)** community connections with other providers in the region,
21 including local housing coalitions, housing providers, providers of coordinated

1 entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and providers of services
2 to individuals who are older Vermonters; individuals who have disabilities, a
3 substance use disorder, or a mental health condition; individuals reentering the
4 community after incarceration; individuals transitioning from the care and
5 custody of the Commissioner for Children and Families; and families with
6 children; and

7 (G) the ability to provide plain language communications to
8 households receiving services.

9 (3) Not less than every three years, the Department shall conduct a
10 reauthorization review of each community action agency providing or causing
11 to provide services pursuant to this chapter. An organization may be subject to
12 corrective actions by the Department if, within the constraint of appropriated
13 resources, it no longer meets the requirements in subdivision (2) of this
14 subsection or has failed to adequately meet the needs of households in its
15 region that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Lack of compliance may
16 result in the Department deciding not to reauthorize the community action
17 agency. The Department may review progress of any previously required
18 corrective actions and may review community action agency performance
19 between reauthorization reviews.

1 § 2206. VHEARTH CORE SERVICES

2 (a) The Department shall enter into an agreement with a statewide
3 organization with population-specific experience serving households that are
4 experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence. The
5 organization shall provide or cause to be provided various shelter and case
6 management services that support households.

7 (b) Each community action agency shall offer or cause to be offered, in
8 collaboration with community partners, each of the following services within
9 its region:

10 (1) supportive services, including:

11 (A) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness,
12 which shall include regional intake shelters;

13 (B) household needs assessments;

14 (C) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

15 (D) housing navigation and retention services;

16 (E) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
17 assistance;

18 (F) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

19 (G) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the
20 household's housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported
21 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability

1 and independent living, and referral to health care assistance such as treatment
2 for mental health conditions and substance use disorder as provided by the
3 designated and specialized services agencies and preferred providers,
4 respectively;

5 (H) advocacy; and

6 (I) progress monitoring and interventions; and

7 (2) the operation of extreme weather event shelters, which may include
8 time-limited congregate accommodations and may be provided through
9 agreements with municipalities or other entities, utilizing available data and
10 considering geographic access to prioritize funding for this purpose; and

11 (3) the operation of emergency shelters in a manner that builds upon the
12 federally required community planning process and prioritizes households in
13 need of the services of an emergency shelter, which may include community-
14 based shelters, temporary use of hotels or motels, lease agreements for full or
15 partial use of an existing building, need-specific shelter arrangements, master
16 grant leases, the development of shelter capacity, or other arrangements or
17 combinations of arrangements that comply with the intent of this chapter.

18 § 2207. USE OF HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

19 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel
20 and motel rooms for emergency housing. Annually, as shelter capacity
21 increases in each region of the State, the use of hotel and motel rooms for

1 emergency housing in that region shall decrease. Annually, as part of the
2 Department's budget presentation, the Department shall set goals for increased
3 housing capacity, including shelter beds, permanent supportive housing, and
4 permanent affordable housing, in addition to proposed corresponding decreases
5 in the use of hotel and motel rooms. The Department shall provide data
6 pertaining to the percentage of increased shelter capacity from the previous
7 fiscal year in each region and how that increase impacts the corresponding
8 hotel and motel room usage for emergency housing in each region pursuant to
9 this subsection for the purpose of informing regional planning and
10 expectations.

11 (b) If hotels and motels are used to provide emergency shelter pursuant to
12 this chapter, the hotel and motel operators shall comply with Program rules and
13 the following rules:

14 (1) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule (CVR
15 13-140-023); and

16 (2) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety
17 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

18 (c) Annually, the Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of
19 its budget presentation for approval by the General Assembly. A community
20 action agency shall not pay or cause to be paid with State monies a per room,
21 per night basis that exceeds the rate approved by the General Assembly.

1 (d) If a hotel or motel is being utilized, a community action agency:

2 (1) shall enter into agreements for the use of blocks of hotel and motel
3 rooms and negotiate the conditions of use for those blocks, including access for
4 providers of case management or other supportive services;

5 (2) shall prioritize the use of hotel and motel room agreements over
6 individual per room, per night hotel or motel room use, unless it is not
7 appropriate to a household's needs; and

8 (3) may use strategic placements to the extent certain populations are
9 not isolated from the wider community served through the Program.

10 § 2208. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

11 (a) The Department and the Agency of Human Services shall have
12 statewide responsibility for meeting the intent of this chapter, including
13 statewide planning, system development, proposing adequate funding, and the
14 involvement of all the Agency's departments.

15 (b) For the purpose of providing administrative oversight and monitoring of
16 the Program established in this chapter, the Department shall:

17 (1)(A) maintain guidance regarding when extreme weather event
18 shelters shall be operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions;
19 and

20 (B) maintain a website with the locations of all extreme weather
21 event shelters;

1 (2) include as part of any review of a community action agency required
2 pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 the community action agency's ability to
3 perform the requirements of this chapter;

4 (3)(A) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
5 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
6 domestic or sexual violence to develop appropriate resource allocations and
7 methods for adjustment that take into account available data, the presence of
8 community-based providers, and customary resource allocation methods,
9 economic indicators, rate of homelessness, rental vacancy rates, and other
10 variables, as appropriate; and

11 (B) annually, distribute funding to each community action agency
12 and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that
13 have experienced domestic or sexual violence using the allocation formula
14 developed pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (b)(3), or if the
15 Department and community action agencies agree, disperse a joint allocation
16 for all community action agencies, which the community action agencies shall
17 determine how to distribute amongst themselves;

18 (4) provide support and technical assistance to the community action
19 agencies, other community partners, and the statewide organization serving
20 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
21 violence;

1 (5) identify specific administrative resources that could be transitioned
2 to community operations;

3 (6) develop and maintain standards for the core services listed in section
4 2206 of this chapter, including the operation of community-based shelters; and

5 (7) adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25, in consultation with the
6 community action agencies and the statewide organization serving households
7 that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence, as
8 appropriate, for the implementation of this chapter, including accommodations
9 for individuals with a disability.

10 § 2209. REGIONAL PLANNING; NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

11 (a) As part of the plan required every three years pursuant to 3 V.S.A.
12 § 3904 and the federally required planning and needs assessments for the
13 continuum of care, the community action agencies shall develop a regional
14 needs assessment and planning process, in collaboration with community and
15 State partners, for use in each community action agency's region to inform
16 future plans addressing housing and homelessness in each region of the State.
17 The regional needs assessment and planning process plans shall include:

18 (1) addressing progress in reducing the number of households
19 experiencing homelessness in a region;

20 (2) assessing the rate households placed in permanent housing return to
21 homelessness and the underlying reasons;

1 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
2 homelessness and efforts to improve the equitable distribution of these
3 resources in the region;

4 (4) reporting the rate of household participation with coordinated entry
5 processes and case management services;

6 (5) identifying system gaps and the funding needed to address those
7 gaps, including periodic inflationary adjustments; and

8 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont’s Point-in-Time Count,
9 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

10 (b) Every three years, each community action agency shall submit plans
11 developed pursuant to this section to the Department in a format prescribed by
12 the Department. Upon receipt of the plans, the Department shall consolidate
13 the results of these reports and submit the consolidated report to the House
14 Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and
15 Welfare.

16 § 2210. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

17 On or before the last day of every third month, the Department shall submit
18 a report, in consultation with the community action agencies and the statewide
19 organization serving households experiencing domestic or sexual violence, to
20 the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health
21 and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee addressing:

1 (1) the number of households served through the Program, by household
2 size and, if applicable, by eligibility category, region, service provider, and
3 type of service;

4 (2) the number of household members employed on a part-time and full-
5 time basis and the number of household members receiving Supplemental
6 Security Income or Social Security disability insurance;

7 (3) changes in capacity for shelter beds, nursing homes, and residential
8 care homes since the previous reporting period;

9 (4) the number of diversions made during the previous reporting period;

10 (5) the number of households whose intake assessment indicated a
11 potential need for services from each department within the Agency;

12 (6) the number of households that have been successfully transitioned to
13 permanent housing since the previous reporting period, the types of housing
14 settings in which they have been placed, and any supportive services they are
15 receiving in conjunction with their housing;

16 (7) the number of households that may be transitioned to permanent
17 housing in the coming months;

18 (8) any State rules and local regulations and ordinances that are
19 impeding the timely development of safe, decent, affordable housing in
20 Vermont communities in order to:

21 (A) identify areas in which flexibility or discretion are available; and

1 (B) advise whether the temporary suspension of relevant State rules
2 and local regulations and ordinances, or the adoption or amendment of State
3 rules, would facilitate faster and less costly revitalization of existing housing
4 and construction of new housing units; and

5 (9) an inventory of all subgrants issued by the statewide organization
6 serving households experiencing or who have experienced domestic or sexual
7 violence and by each community action agency.

8 § 2204 2211. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

9 (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory
10 council whose membership reflects, to the extent possible, the growing
11 diversity among Vermonters, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous,
12 and Persons of Color, as well as with regards to socioeconomic status,
13 geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status. Members of
14 an advisory council shall include organizations providing services in the
15 region, the Department, and representatives of the Agency and each
16 department of the Agency, as needed. A regional advisory council may
17 collaborate with individuals with lived experience of homelessness,
18 community partners, State partners, housing providers, local housing
19 coalitions, statewide homelessness organizations, providers of coordinated
20 entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and municipalities in the
21 region served by the community action agency.

* * *

* * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2027 * * *

Sec. 5. 33 V.S.A. § 2202 is amended to read:

§ 2202. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

(1) replace the provision of emergency housing through the General
Assistance Program established in chapter 21 of this title and the Housing
Opportunity Grant Program and use funds and resources previously attributed
to those programs, and any other identified State and federal monies, to fund
the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
Housing Program established in this chapter; and

(2) reduce reliance on the use of hotel and motel rooms to shelter
participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters throughout
the State for this purpose.

* * * Implementation Planning and Initial Regional Assessments * * *

Sec. 6. VHEARTH IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

(a) On or before October 1, 2025, the Department for Children and
Families, in collaboration with the community action agencies, and the
statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that have
experienced domestic or sexual violence, shall submit the first of two written

1 implementation plans to the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate
2 Committee on Health and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee outlining its
3 initial plans for the implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency
4 Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program established by 33
5 V.S.A. chapter 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the first
6 implementation plan shall include:

7 (1) a process that community action agencies, in coordination with the
8 Department, shall use to conduct regularly occurring regional needs
9 assessments and develop future regional plans, including consideration of
10 municipal needs;

11 (2) recommended performance measures to evaluate the community
12 action agencies and the statewide organization serving households that are
13 experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence in carrying
14 out their duties under 33 V.S.A. chapter 22, including:

15 (A) the provision of any previously agreed upon information to
16 enable the Department to evaluate the services provided through grant funds,
17 the effect on households receiving services, and an accounting of expended
18 grant funds; and

19 (B) performance measures that may be specific to an individual
20 region of the State or provider;

1 (3) recommended eligibility for each of the services offered through 33

2 V.S.A. chapter 22;

3 (4) guidance regarding when extreme weather event shelters shall be
4 operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions;

5 (5) a timeline for the implementation of core services listed in 33 V.S.A.
6 § 2206 for the first six months of fiscal year 2027;

7 (6) recommended intake and assessment processes to determine
8 appropriate shelter and services for households based on Program eligibility;
9 and

10 (7) a recommended process to enable an unwilling community action
11 agency to opt-out of participation in the Program in a manner that gives the
12 State adequate notice.

13 (b) On or before January 15, 2026, the Department for Children and
14 Families, in collaboration with the community action agencies, regional
15 advisory councils established pursuant to 33 V.S.A. § 2204, and the statewide
16 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
17 domestic or sexual violence, shall submit the second of two written
18 implementation plans to the House Committee on Human Services and the
19 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare outlining its initial plans for the
20 implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
21 Responsive Transition to Housing Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter

1 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the second implementation plan

2 shall include recommendations on the following:

3 (1) funding allocations among the community action agencies and other
4 providers, including for services specific to households that are experiencing or
5 that have experienced domestic or sexual violence;

6 (2) additional State and federal funding and other resources identified
7 for the Program;

8 (3) establishing an appeals process that includes a hearing before the
9 Human Services Board and an option for an expedited appeals process;

10 (4) the role of 211 within the intake system;

11 (5) whether access to all or some services should include an expectation
12 regarding household participation in case management services or other
13 expectations such as night limits on the use of hotels and motels, and, if so,
14 what elements and in what circumstances participation in case management
15 services or other expectations should be applied;

16 (6) whether the use of emergency shelter should include financial
17 participation, and, if so, what that participation should include;

18 (7) whether intake and assessment processes should include verification
19 of residency, homelessness, and household income;

20 (8) how to best ensure that there is equitable access to shelter and
21 supportive services for households experiencing homelessness;

1 (9) the number of housing vouchers that Vermont lost in the past year, if
2 the data is available; and

3 (10) any anticipated challenges requiring a legislative solution.

4 **Sec. 7. INTERIM AND FINAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT PLANS**

5 Prior to the enactment of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
6 Responsive Transition to Housing Program on July 1, 2026, the statewide
7 organization serving households experiencing or that have experienced
8 domestic or sexual violence and community action agencies shall conduct
9 initial needs assessments in accordance with the process developed in Sec.
10 6(a)(1) of this act. On or before January 15, 2026, the community action
11 agencies shall submit one comprehensive progress report and the statewide
12 organization shall submit a separate report to the House Committees on
13 Appropriations and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on
14 Appropriations and on Health and Welfare, including estimated fiscal year
15 2027 budget proposals, estimated costs of administering the Program, and an
16 analysis of any barriers to generating additional shelter and permanent housing
17 in the region. On or before April 1, 2026, the statewide organization shall
18 submit a report and the community action agencies shall submit a separate
19 comprehensive report detailing the results of each region's needs assessment
20 and implementation plans, which shall not exceed the budgetary proposals
21 provided in the January 15, 2026 progress report, to the House Committees on

1 Appropriations and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on
2 Appropriations and on Health and Welfare. The initial needs assessment
3 conducted pursuant to this section shall include:

4 (1) addressing progress in reducing the number of households
5 experiencing homelessness in a region;

6 (2) assessing the rate households placed in permanent housing return to
7 homelessness and the underlying reasons;

8 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
9 homelessness and efforts to improve the equitable distribution of these
10 resources in the region;

11 (4) reporting the rate of household participation with coordinated entry
12 processes and case management services;

13 (5) identifying system gaps and the funding needed to address those
14 gaps, including periodic inflationary adjustments; and

15 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont's Point-in-Time Count,
16 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

17 **Sec. 8. ACCELERATED IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY**

18 On or before November 1, 2025, the Department for Children and Families
19 shall submit for consideration a detailed written plan, including a timeline, to
20 accelerate implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance
21 and Responsive Transition to Housing Program as part of the fiscal year 2026

1 budget adjustment process to the Joint Fiscal Committee, to the House
2 Committees on Appropriations and on Human Services, and to the Senate
3 Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare. The plan shall
4 address the readiness of community providers to implement the Program prior
5 to July 1, 2026, fiscal estimates for the remainder of fiscal year 2026, and an
6 assessment as to whether the Program is anticipated to be operable on or before
7 July 1, 2026.

8 * * * Community Action Agencies * * *

9 Sec. 9. 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 is amended to read:

10 CHAPTER 59. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES

11 § 3901. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

12 (a) Recognizing that the economic well-being and social equity of every
13 Vermonter has long been a fundamental concern of the State, it remains
14 evident that ~~poverty continues to be the lot of~~ a substantial number of
15 Vermont's population continues to experience poverty. It is the policy of ~~this~~
16 the State to help develop the full potential of each of its citizens so they can
17 contribute to the fullest extent possible to the life of our communities and the
18 State as a whole.

19 (b) It is the purpose of this chapter to strengthen, supplement, and
20 coordinate efforts that further this policy through:

1 (1) the strengthening of community capabilities for planning,
2 coordinating, and managing federal, State, and other sources of assistance
3 related to the problem of poverty;

4 (2) the better organization and utilization of a range of services related
5 to the needs of ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income; and

6 (3) the broadening of the resource base of programs to secure a more
7 active role in assisting ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income from business,
8 labor, and other groups from the private sector.

9 § 3902. OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

10 (a) The Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity is hereby
11 authorized to allocate available financial assistance for community ~~services~~
12 action agencies and programs in accordance with State and federal law and
13 regulation.

14 (b) The Director may provide financial assistance to community ~~services~~
15 action agencies for the planning, conduct, administration, and evaluation of
16 community ~~service~~ action programs to provide a range of services and
17 activities having a measurable and potentially major impact on causes of
18 poverty in the community or in areas of the community where poverty is a
19 particularly acute problem. Components of those services and activities may
20 involve, without limitation of other activities and supporting facilities designed
21 to assist ~~low-income~~ participants with low income:

- 1 (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;
- 2 (2) to obtain adequate education;
- 3 (3) to make better use of available income;
- 4 (4) to ~~provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living~~
5 ~~environment~~ have access to safe, secure, permanent housing;
- 6 (5) to obtain prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery services
7 ~~for the prevention of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and for the rehabilitation~~
8 ~~of narcotic addicts and alcoholics~~ individuals with substance use disorder;
- 9 (6) to obtain emergency assistance through loans and grants to meet
10 immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for
11 health services, nutritious food, housing, and unemployment-related assistance;
- 12 (7) to remove obstacles and solve personal and family problems ~~which~~
13 that block achievement of self-sufficiency;
- 14 (8) to achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community;
- 15 (9) to make more frequent and effective use of other programs related to
16 the purposes of this chapter; and
- 17 (10) to coordinate and establish linkages between governmental and
18 other social service programs to ~~assure~~ ensure the effective delivery of such
19 services to ~~low-income~~ persons; with low income and to encourage the use of
20 entities in the private sector of the community in efforts to ameliorate poverty
21 in the community.

1 (c) The Director is authorized to adopt rules pursuant to chapter 25 of this
2 title appropriate to the carrying out of this chapter and the purposes thereof.

3 § 3903. DESIGNATION OF AGENCIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND
4 ACTIVITIES TO AMELIORATE OR ELIMINATE POVERTY

5 The Director shall designate private nonprofit ~~community-based~~
6 community-based organizations ~~who~~ that have demonstrated or ~~who~~ that can
7 demonstrate the ability to provide services and activities as defined in
8 subsection 3902(b) of this title as community ~~services~~ action agencies.

9 § 3904. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCY PLAN

10 Each designated community ~~services~~ action agency shall determine the need
11 for activities and services within the area served by the agency and shall
12 thereafter prepare a community services plan ~~which~~ that describes the method
13 by which the agency will provide those services. The plan shall include a
14 schedule for the anticipated provision of new or additional services and shall
15 specify the resources ~~which~~ that are needed by and available to the agency to
16 implement the plan. The community services plan shall be completed every
17 three years and updated annually. The plan shall include the regional needs
18 assessment required under 33 V.S.A. § 2209.

§ 3905. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES;

ADMINISTRATION

(a) Each community ~~services~~ action agency shall administer its programs as set out in the community services plan and as approved by its board of directors.

(b) Each board of a nonprofit ~~community-based~~ community-based organization that is designated a community ~~services~~ action agency under section 3903 of this chapter shall have an executive committee of not more than seven members who shall be representative of the composition of the board and the board shall be so constituted that:

* * *

(2) one-third of the members of the board are persons chosen in accordance with election procedures adequate to ~~assure~~ ensure that they are representative of ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income in the area served; and

(3) the remainder of the members of the board are officials or members of business, industry, labor, religious, welfare, education, or other major groups and interests in the community.

(c) Each member of ~~the~~ a board selected to represent a specific geographic area within a community shall reside in the area ~~he or she~~ the member represents. ~~No person selected under subdivisions (2) or (3) of subsection (b) as a member of a board shall serve on such board for more than five~~

1 ~~consecutive years, or more than a total of 10 years~~ Each board shall adopt term
2 limits to govern its members.

3 * * * Appropriations * * *

4 Sec. 10. APPROPRIATION; TRANSITION PLANNING

5 In fiscal year 2026, \$10,000,000.00 of one-time funding is appropriated
6 from the General Fund as follows:

7 (1) \$5,085,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families to plan
8 for the implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
9 Responsive Transition to Housing Program as needed, which may be
10 distributed to entities such as the community action agencies;

11 (2) \$400,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
12 distribution to the statewide organization serving households experiencing or
13 who have experienced domestic or sexual violence;

14 (3) \$515,000.00 to the Department of Health for distribution to Bridges
15 to Health for services to individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at
16 risk of becoming homeless;

17 (4) \$1,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for the
18 distribution of grants to municipalities planning and implementing services for
19 households that are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness, in
20 collaboration with the community action agency serving a municipality's
21 region; and

1 (5) \$3,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families to
2 enhance capacity for the creation and expansion of emergency shelters and
3 permanent supportive housing capacity, a subset of which shall be distributed
4 to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for infrastructure investments
5 and administered in consultation with the Department to ensure new
6 investments are paired with appropriate support services.

7 Sec. 11. FUTURE APPROPRIATIONS; LEGISLATIVE INTENT

8 It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

9 (1) in fiscal year 2027 and thereafter, funds and resources previously
10 appropriated for General Assistance emergency housing be redesignated for
11 the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
12 Housing Program pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22; and

13 (2) in fiscal year 2028 and thereafter, funds and resources previously
14 appropriated for the Housing Opportunity Grant program be redesignated for
15 the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
16 Housing Program pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

17 Sec. 12. TRANSITION; HOUSING OPPORTUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

18 As part of its fiscal year 2028 budget presentation, the Department for
19 Children and Families shall present a plan for transitioning Housing
20 Opportunity Grant Program funding and duties to the Vermont Homeless

Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 13. EFFECTIVE DATES

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, except that:

(1) Secs. 4 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
Transition to Housing Program) and 9 (community action agencies) shall take
effect on July 1, 2026;

(2) Sec. 5 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
Transition to Housing Program) shall take effect on July 1, 2027; and

(3) the Department for Children and Families shall commence the
rulemaking process prior July 1, 2026 in order to have rules in place on that
date.

(Committee vote: _____)

Senator _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE