

## Testimony for House Human Services

by Fred Breunig, Brattleboro VT

Thank you for inviting Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) to testify today. My name is Fred Breunig, a member of Guilford Community Church United Church of Christ. I live in Brattleboro.

Like many parts of Vermont, Brattleboro is grappling with how to care for neighbors who are without housing. On Wednesday you heard from my colleagues at Groundworks Collaborative—a critical organization in our town—but one that is stretched thin by the overwhelming need. Their overnight shelter is always full with a waiting list, leaving an estimated 80 people—which includes some children—totally unsheltered. Some residents in town have been trying to raise money on their own to take people to motels on the coldest nights.

Regarding H.91, VIA appreciates your committee's focus on a long-term, sustainable solution for emergency shelter, rather than relying on last-minute, temporary fixes. The inclusion of an Advisory Committee with people who have lived experience is a great step forward, as is the plan for rights of appeal. However, we urge you to reexamine the limits on the length of stay in emergency shelters.

While we appreciate the millions allocated for new housing, there remains a gap between the current need for shelter and the availability of new housing options. In the meantime, it is crucial to ensure that people who are currently unhoused remain sheltered and safe. Without sufficient shelter availability, many individuals may find themselves in precarious situations that could lead to further instability. We ask that you address this gap and consider extending stay limits to ensure that everyone who needs a safe place can have one as we work toward permanent housing solutions.

I will conclude by stressing the moral imperative we all share—whether as individuals, communities, or as a state—to care for our neighbors. Across faith traditions, philosophies, and cultures, the principle of "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" is universally recognized. It speaks to our shared duty to treat others and our planet with care and respect.

The stories you heard on Thursday are just a small sample of the many others out there. I know many of you share our concerns and our desire for a more compassionate world. Thank you for doing the hard work to help make that vision a reality.

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