

My name is Jason Braasch, I am a Vermont resident since 1986, I am currently living in central Vermont in stable housing. I currently work at the Hedding United Methodist Church in Barre, I am founding member of the Social Action Team at Hedding, and also a member of Vermont Interfaith Action. I have volunteered at the emergency overnight shelter in Montpelier as well as in Barre. In the not so distant past I was sheltered at ANEW place in Burlington as well as the Hilltop Inn in Berlin, as well as living at homeless encampments, at Sears lane and in Boston. I have spent years living outside.

Well, I am still not 100% sure what the intention of H.91 is, even after reading thru twice, but it looks as though the proposal is to strike the hotel program by 2026. It is unclear what the temporary shelter program will look like exactly? What do interim shelter opportunities look like?

I have a VERY VERY low opinion of the current situation. the attempts at a shelter rather than a hotel seemed to be plagued by the very same human failings. I had experience living at a ANEW place in Burlington, where I saw the folks working there routinely abuse guests. There was enforced social isolation and a lack of connection to each other and services. This was happening all the while in dismal conditions. Remember: this place was once the BROWN motel. A notorious low bottom hangout. At one point I was buying and using drugs there. I couldn't see the difference in its newest version as a shelter.

What I saw the the hotel/motel program achieve was effectively take a vulnerable population and ostracized them, enforcing social isolation and have the power over individuals to mette out punitive measures by managers and hotel operators. This had folks living in fear, and chaos. There is no

immediate on site support to assist with navigation away from the current situation that most are in. The onus is on the individual to find the agency that could provide services, and often it is not anywhere near the place where a person is lodged. Folks are often without a car, making it difficult to get to the agency or services needed. In addition, from what I could see, there are frequently clear violations of minimum standards for living (which are almost never reported for the fear of loss of housing). This seems to drive people further into the social fringe, exacerbating most mental and physical ailments in my opinion.

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What i saw in Boston at the pine street inn when I stayed there was a well organized effort at shelter, with a host of onsite services or connection to services, and a robust effort to connect with people and for people to have connection with each other. There was never anything but professional and courteous behavior on the part of staff, with consistency in rules and routine. I think it would be smart to follow an example of something that works.

My hope is that we can move towards a system that allows connection rather than isolation, that we can provide assistance and access to services in an organized and consistent way, with real infrastructure, currently we are seeing people turn up in need that are being sheltered at emergency overnight shelters, hosted by churches, staffed by volunteers. I can imagine that we have the resources and ability to do a little better for our neighbors. I can't state this enough, that there is an interconnection between all things. And the health of my neighbors is partly my health. I know we can do better. It strikes me that here is a situation that is horrible, and part of the horror of it that we cannot stop suddenly in the middle of this. We have already got the folks who are now absolutely dependent on this housing/hotel situation. This can't be just dropped without a transition to real solid assistance.

I do realize that the geographical challenges of this state present a hurdle. This, coupled with the low population density makes for a unique situation. What might be applied in areas with robust and accessible public transportation, and with large condensed population centers might not be applied here. So I acknowledge the challenges that this situation presents. We need a proactive solution and I believe that H.50 which was kicked to institutions is part of the solution. We need an actual infrastructure.