

Comments on H. 92

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The Need for Legal Assistance

- Legal Needs Survey found unmet need for legal help among people experiencing homelessness.
- 708 calls asking for legal help with emergency housing, 3,278 website page views (2022-2023)
- In 2024, Legal Aid closed 63 emergency housing cases, including 13 administrative agency decisions and 8 negotiated settlements.
- VLA represents Vermonters in HSB appeals for other benefits as well (food stamps, Medicaid, etc.)

Access for Self-Represented Appellants

- We support making HSB more accessible.
- We support regular meetings between Legal Aid and HSB.
- We support plain language requirement in H. 92.
- We recommend adding to the bills a requirement for more comprehensive, plain-language instructions for appellants

Expedited Emergency Housing Appeals

Expedited in practice, 1986 memo, needs codification

Delays getting records from the Department

Recommendations:

- Same- or next-day supervisor review.
- Simultaneous record transmission
- Hearing officer decision within 5 days.
- Immediate implementation of favorable decisions.

Need for Final, Reported Decisions

We never get a final decision favorable to appellants under current system, because any favorable decision is dismissed as moot.

This breaks the feedback loop and delays or blocks systemic improvement.

Recommendation:

Add language to H. 92 to ensure hearing officer recommended decisions, including ones favorable to people needing housing, become final, published HSB decisions