

1 Introduced by Committee on Human Services

2 Date:

3 Subject: Human services; emergency housing

4 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to establish a  
5 continuum of supports and services to prevent or divert households from  
6 homelessness and to address the needs of Vermonters who are homeless.

7 An act relating to establishing the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum

8 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

9 \* \* \* Findings, Legislative Intent, and Purpose \* \* \*

10 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

11 The General Assembly finds that:

12 (1) according to the Vermont Homeless Management Information  
13 System, as of December 2025 there were X individuals who were homeless in  
14 the State, X of whom were children; and

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

18 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

19 It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

1           (1) unsheltered homelessness be eliminated and that homelessness in  
2 Vermont be rare, brief, and nonrecurring;

3           (2) utilization of an emergency housing benefit through the General  
4 Assistance program end and be replaced by a continuum of care;

5           (3) homelessness be reduced in Vermont and interim shelter  
6 opportunities, including specialized shelter options, be available to provide a  
7 stable pathway to permanent housing for all Vermonters experiencing  
8 homelessness;

9           (4) Vermont increase the supply of emergency shelters as well as  
10 permanent supportive housing that meets the specific needs of households;

11           (5) Vermont reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel  
12 rooms to shelter.

13 Sec. 3. PURPOSE

14           It is the purpose of this act to:

15           (1) create a continuum of supports and services for households who are  
16 experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of experiencing homelessness;

17           (2) ensure that tailored, temporary emergency housing assistance is  
18 available to vulnerable Vermonters in a manner that encourages efficient and  
19 accountable use of taxpayer funds;

20           (3) support self-sufficiency and reduce returns to homelessness by  
21 encouraging active participation developing personalized housing plans;

1           (4) establish clear eligibility criteria, accountability measures, and  
2           require active household participation;

3           (5) expand the use of alternative emergency housing models in  
4           partnership with municipalities, nonprofit community-based providers, and  
5           private landlords;

6           (6) integrate supportive services to assist households to achieve  
7           permanent housing stability;

8           (7) establish transparent accountability measures, reporting  
9           requirements, and oversight mechanisms;

10           (8) increase program efficiency and promote maximum flexibility in  
11           administering services and supports in the continuum; and

12           (9) create a diversified system of emergency housing options, such as  
13           shelters, specialized shelters, shared housing arrangements, host-home models,  
14           master-leased units, and rapid rehousing placements, that provide cost-  
15           effective, sustainable, and supportive outcomes to participants.

16           \* \* \* Creation of the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum \* \* \*

17           Sec. 4. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is added to read:

18           CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS RESPONSE CONTINUUM

19           § 2201. DEFINITIONS

20           As used in this chapter:

1           (1) “Alternative housing options” means housing options such as  
2           shelters, specialized shelters, transitional housing, recovery residences, shared  
3           housing arrangements, host-home models, master-leased units, and rapid  
4           rehousing placements.

5           (2) “Applicant” means a household that applies for assistance.

6           (3) “At risk of homelessness” means precariously housed without  
7           sufficient income, resources, or support to prevent homelessness.

8           (4) “Case management services” means individualized supports  
9           connecting households to public benefits, health care, employment, and  
10           permanent housing or other services.

11           (5) “Coordinated entry” means a standardized process to assess needs,  
12           prioritize resources, and refer households to appropriate housing interventions.

13           (6) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

14           (7) “Disability” means a physical, sensory, cognitive, developmental, or  
15           mental health condition or substance use disorder that substantially limits one  
16           or more major life activities, or that requires ongoing support, accommodation,  
17           or treatment to maintain an individual’s health, safety, or independence. The  
18           term includes chronic or episodic conditions that significantly impact daily  
19           functioning, regardless of whether the individual is receiving, or is eligible to  
20           receive, federal disability benefits.

1           (8) “Diversion” means an intervention strategy designed to prevent  
2           immediate homelessness by helping a household identify an immediate  
3           alternative housing option.

4           (9) “Eligible household” means a household that is physically present  
5           and intends to reside in Vermont as evidenced by active participation in a  
6           housing, employment, or other Agency of Human Services-recognized plan.

7           (10) “Emergency cold-weather shelter” means publicly funded shelter  
8           beds made available to households during periods when the National Weather  
9           Service is forecasting temperatures at or below 10 degrees Fahrenheit  
10           including windchill.

11           (11) “Emergency housing” means the provision of temporary  
12           accommodations, or related services necessary to protect the health, safety, and  
13           welfare of eligible households.

14           (12) “Homeless” means:

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

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

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

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

19           (13) “Household” means an individual or group of individuals, with or  
20           without children, including individuals who reside together as one economic

1 unit, who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried, without a fixed  
2 nighttime residence or at immediate risk of losing housing.

3 (14) “Minor child” means an individual under 18 years of age.

4 (15) “Office” means of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

5 (16) “Permanent supportive housing” means long-term housing with  
6 wraparound services for individuals with a disability that impact activities of  
7 daily living.

8 (17) “Prevention” means services intended to prevent a household from  
9 becoming homeless, such as housing relocation or stabilization services or  
10 short-term rental assistance, including rental arrearage.

11 (18) “Program” means the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum.

12 (19) “Rapid rehousing” means short- to medium-term rental assistance  
13 and supportive services aimed at quickly exiting homelessness.

14 (20) “Shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s shelter  
15 standards for time-limited housing.

16 (21) “Specialized shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s  
17 shelter standards for time-limited or transitional housing with additional  
18 services such as health care, mental health services, or services related to  
19 substance use disorder.

20 (22) “Supportive services” means individualized supports that assist a  
21 household in obtaining and maintaining housing, including:

1           (A) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness;

2           (B) household needs assessments;

3           (C) case management;

4           (D) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

5           (E) housing navigation services;

6           (F) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial  
7 assistance;

8           (G) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

9           (H) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the  
10 household’s housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported  
11 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability  
12 and independent living advocacy, and referral to health care assistance such as  
13 treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorder as provided  
14 by the designated and specialized services agencies and preferred providers,  
15 respectively, or other providers; and

16           (I) progress monitoring and interventions.

17           (23) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not  
18 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation such as a  
19 car or tent.

1     § 2202. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS RESPONSE

2             CONTINUUM

3             (a) The Vermont Homeless Response Continuum is established to create an  
4     array of services that prevent and address homelessness in Vermont. The  
5     Program shall be administered by the Department’s Office of Economic  
6     Opportunity.

7             (b) The Department shall maintain a continuum of care that is flexible,  
8     housing-focused, and designed to prevent homelessness whenever possible.  
9     The continuum shall prioritize early intervention, rapid resolution of housing  
10    crises, and equitable access of emergency and permanent housing.

11    § 2203. CONTINUUM OF CARE COMPONENTS

12            (a) The continuum of care shall consist of the following services:

13                (1) prevention and diversion services;

14                (2) emergency housing services;

15                (3) shelter services;

16                (4) specialized shelter services;

17                (5) permanent supportive housing services; and

18                (6) other services as necessary.

19            (b) The Office of Economic Opportunity shall address each of the services  
20    in subsection (a) of this section by separate line items in its budget. The  
21    Department shall be responsible for any transfers to other Agency of Human

1 Services departments necessary to implement the services listed in subsection  
2 (a) of this section. The Department and other departments within the Agency  
3 of Human Services shall maximize federal receipts, as applicable, for services  
4 listed in subsection (a) of this section.

5 § 2204. PREVENTION AND DIVERSION SERVICES

6 Prevention and diversion services shall function as the primary entry point  
7 to the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum for all households. The  
8 Department shall ensure that prevention and diversion services are provided  
9 through an agreement with one or more community partners throughout the  
10 State. All households, upon request for assistance, shall receive a standardized  
11 prevention and diversion assessment to identify safe alternatives to  
12 homelessness and resolve immediate housing barriers. Prevention includes  
13 activities to avert entry into homelessness, including financial assistance,  
14 landlord mediation, and legal assistance. Diversion includes problem-solving  
15 interventions and supports that safely resolve a housing crisis without the use  
16 of shelter or hotel placements. Funds administered for prevention and  
17 diversion services shall have maximum flexibility.

18 § 2205. EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES

19 Emergency housing services shall consist of:

20 (1) Financial aid to municipalities throughout the State to ensure  
21 equitable access to shelter without regard for eligibility when the National

1 Weather Service declares a cold weather advisory. Services provided pursuant  
2 to this subdivision shall be time limited, shall not require a coordinated entry  
3 assessment or case management, and shall have minimal data reporting  
4 requirements.

5 (2) Emergency cold weather shelters managed through an agreement  
6 between the Department and one or more community partners to provide  
7 overnight, low-barrier shelter. The Department and community partners shall  
8 ensure equitable access to emergency cold weather shelters for communities  
9 with a high number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

10 Services provided pursuant to this subdivision shall be time limited, shall not  
11 require a coordinated entry assessment or case management, and shall have  
12 minimal data reporting requirements.

13 (3) Winter use of hotels and motels between December 1 and March 31  
14 of each year when no other temporary or permanent housing or shelter services  
15 are available. Services provided pursuant to this section shall not be on a  
16 night-by-night basis and shall require a coordinated entry assessment and  
17 assignment of a lead case management entity.

18 § 2206. SHELTER SERVICES

19 The Department shall determine the need for and develop shelter  
20 services accordingly, ensuring that the shelter services meet the Department of  
21 Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR 28-070-001). To

1 the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Department shall enter  
2 into agreements with community partners for the provision of shelter services  
3 for not less than a minimum of a two-year period.

4 § 2207. SPECIALIZED SHELTER SERVICES

5 The Department shall determine the need for and develop specialized  
6 shelter services accordingly that meet the requirements of section 2206 of this  
7 chapter and provide additional specialized services, such as those that address  
8 substance use disorders, mental health conditions, or health care issues. The  
9 payment rate structure for specialized shelter services shall include a base rate  
10 and supplement payment.

11 § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS WITH SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

12 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel  
13 and motel rooms for emergency housing. However, until sufficient permanent  
14 affordable housing or shelter services are available, the use of hotel and motel  
15 services shall be permitted pursuant to subdivision 2205(3) of this chapter.

16 (b) Annually, as shelter capacity increases and the number of households  
17 experiencing homelessness decreases in each region of the State, the use of  
18 hotel and motel rooms for emergency housing in that region shall decrease.  
19 Annually, as part of the Department’s budget presentation, the Department  
20 shall set goals for increased housing capacity, including permanent supportive  
21 housing, permanent affordable housing, and shelter beds, some of which may

1 be population specific, in addition to proposed corresponding decreases in the  
2 use of hotel and motel rooms. The Department shall provide data pertaining to  
3 the percentage of increased shelter capacity from the previous fiscal year in  
4 each region and how that increase impacts the corresponding hotel and motel  
5 room usage for emergency housing in each region pursuant to this subsection  
6 for the purpose of informing regional planning and expectations.

7 (c) If hotels and motels are used pursuant to this chapter, the hotel and  
8 motel operators shall comply with Program rules and the following rules:

9 (1) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule (CVR  
10 13-140-023); and

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

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

17 (e) If a hotel or motel is being utilized, the Department:

18 (1) shall enter an agreement with one or more community partners to  
19 provide relevant support services;

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

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

7           (4) may use population-specific placements to the extent certain  
8           populations are not isolated from the wider community served through the  
9           Program.

10           § 2209. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING SERVICES

11           TBD

12           § 2210. CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

13           Case management services shall be required for all eligible households  
14           participating in the Program, except where specifically exempted for certain  
15           services. Case management services provided pursuant to this chapter shall be  
16           informed by the acuity level of the eligible household and include  
17           individualized supports that connect an eligible household to public assistance  
18           health care, employment, permanent housing, and other services. Each eligible  
19           household shall be assigned a lead case management entity, which may be  
20           from any Agency of Human Services department or a community partner.

21           § 2211. RULEMAKING

1        The Department shall adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 for  
2        implementation of this the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum.

3        § 2212. REPORTING

4        Annually, the Department shall submit a written report to the House  
5        Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and  
6        Welfare addressing:

7        **TBD**

8                                \* \* \* Continuums of Care; Required Merger \* \* \*

9        Sec. 5. MERGER OF CONTINUUMS OF CARE

10        In order to promote the effective use of resources and continuity of care, the  
11        Department for Children and Families’ Office of Economic Opportunity shall  
12        work in collaboration with the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance, the  
13        Balance of State Continuum of Care, and the U.S. Department of Housing and  
14        Urban Development to establish a single continuum of care in the State on or  
15        before July 1, 2028.

16                                \* \* \* Effective July 1, 2028: Requirements of Grantees \* \* \*

17        Sec. 6. 33 V.S.A. § 2213 is added to read:

18        § 2213. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

19        Any grant or other agreement executed by the Agency of Human Services  
20        as part of the Vermont Homeless Response Continuum shall require a  
21        community partner, as appropriate, to:



1 supportive services and shelter to those households that are experiencing or  
2 that have experienced domestic or sexual violence. The Department shall  
3 conduct regular reviews of the statewide organization to ensure compliance  
4 with this section and the executed agreement. The statewide organization may  
5 be subject to corrective actions by the Department if, within the constraint of  
6 appropriated resources, it no longer meets the requirements of this section or  
7 the executed agreement or has failed to adequately meet the needs of  
8 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual  
9 violence. If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities under  
10 this section, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that there  
11 is not a gap in services.

12 \* \* \* Removing Reporting Requirement on General Assistance Emergency  
13 Housing \* \* \*

14 Sec. 8. 33 V.S.A. § 2115 is amended to read:

15 § 2115. GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REPORT

16 On or before September 1 of each year, the Commissioner for Children and  
17 Families shall submit a written report to the Joint Fiscal Committee; the House  
18 Committees on Appropriations, on General, and Housing, ~~and Military Affairs,~~  
19 and on Human Services; and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on  
20 Health and Welfare. The report shall contain the following:

- 1 (1) an evaluation of the General Assistance program during the previous
- 2 fiscal year;
- 3 (2) any recommendations for changes to the program;
- 4 (3) a plan for continued implementation of the program; and
- 5 (4) ~~statewide statistics using deidentified data related to the use of~~
- 6 ~~emergency housing vouchers during the preceding State fiscal year, including~~
- 7 ~~demographic information, client data, shelter and motel usage rates, clients'~~
- 8 ~~primary stated cause of homelessness, and average lengths of stay in~~
- 9 ~~emergency housing by demographic group and by type of housing; and~~
- 10 (5) other information the Commissioner deems appropriate.

11 \* \* \* Payment Rate Structure and Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations \* \* \*

12 Sec. 9. PAYMENT RATE STRUCTURE; SHELTER SERVICES

13 On or before July 1, 2027, the Department, in collaboration with the

14 Agency of Human Services and relevant community partners, shall establish a

15 payment rate structure for all shelter services required by this act. The

16 structure shall include a base rate and a supplemental payment for specialized

17 shelter services. It is not the intent of the General Assembly that the payment

18 rate structure established pursuant to this section cover the full operating

19 expenses of shelters throughout the State.

20 Sec. 10. APPROPRIATION; VERMONT HOMELESS RESPONSE

21 CONTINUUM

