

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 Homelessness Response
8 Continuum

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

10 * * * Findings, Legislative Intent, and Purpose * * *

11 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

12 The General Assembly finds that:

13 (1) although an imperfect tool for measuring the true number of
14 unhoused Vermonters, the Vermont Homeless Management Information
15 System as of December 2025 indicated that there were 4,022 individuals who
16 were homeless in the State, 863 of whom were children under 18 years of age;
17 and

18 (2) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that of the
19 36,000 primary homes needed in Vermont between 2025 and 2029, the number
20 needed to address homelessness is 3,295.

1 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

2 It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

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

5 (2) Vermont reduce reliance on the inefficient use of hotel and motel
6 rooms for emergency housing;

7 (3) utilization of an emergency housing benefit to access hotels and
8 motels through the General Assistance program end and be replaced by a
9 continuum of care; and

10 (4) a continuum of supports and services be available to provide a stable
11 pathway to permanent housing that meets the specific needs of households
12 experiencing homelessness.

13 Sec. 3. PURPOSE

14 It is the purpose of this act to:

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

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

- 1 (3) support self-sufficiency and reduce returns to homelessness by
2 developing personalized housing plans with required participation by
3 households;
- 4 (4) establish clear eligibility criteria and require active household
5 participation;
- 6 (5) expand the use of alternative emergency housing models in
7 partnership with municipalities, nonprofit community-based providers, and
8 private landlords;
- 9 (6) integrate supportive services to assist households to achieve
10 permanent housing stability;
- 11 (7) establish transparent accountability measures, reporting
12 requirements, and oversight mechanisms;
- 13 (8) increase program efficiency and promote maximum flexibility in
14 administering services and supports in the continuum;
- 15 (9) empower local communities to administer emergency housing
16 services with maximum flexibility; and
- 17 (10) create a diversified system of emergency housing options,
18 including shelters, specialized shelters, shared housing arrangements, host-
19 home models, master-lease units, and rapid rehousing placements, that provide
20 cost-effective, sustainable, and supportive outcomes to households.

1 * * * Creation of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum * * *

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

3 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE CONTINUUM

4 § 2201. DEFINITIONS

5 As used in this chapter:

6 (1) “Alternative housing options” means housing options including
7 shelters, specialized shelters, transitional housing, recovery residences, shared
8 housing arrangements, host-home models, master-lease units, and rapid
9 rehousing placements.

10 (2) “Applicant” means a household that applies for emergency housing
11 assistance.

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

14 (4) “Case management services” means individualized supportive
15 services.

16 (5) “Coordinated entry” means a process that standardizes the way
17 households at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness access and
18 are assessed for and referred to the housing and services that a household needs
19 for housing stability.

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

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

9 (8) “Diversion” means a strategy aimed at preventing homelessness by
10 helping households find immediate alternative housing options instead of
11 entering shelters. Diversion focuses on addressing the needs of those who
12 have recently lost their housing.

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

17 (10) “Emergency cold-weather shelter” means publicly funded shelter
18 beds made available to households during periods when the National Weather
19 Service is forecasting temperatures at or below 10 degrees Fahrenheit
20 including windchill for the majority of the State.

1 (11) “Emergency housing” means temporary shelter, lodging, or other
2 housing support, or related services provided to eligible households to protect
3 the health, safety, and welfare of an eligible household when no safe housing
4 option is immediately available.

5 (12) “Homeless” means:

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

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

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

9 (D) residing in a place not meant for human habitation, such as cars,
10 parks, abandoned buildings, or streets; or

11 (E) otherwise defined as homeless under federal law.

12 (13) “Household” means an individual or group of individuals, with or
13 without children, including individuals who reside together as one economic
14 unit, who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

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

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

17 (16) “Permanent supportive housing” means long-term housing with
18 wraparound services for individuals with complex health and social needs.

19 (17) “Prevention” means services intended to prevent a household from
20 becoming homeless, including housing relocation or stabilization services or
21 short-term rental assistance, including rental arrearage.

1 (18) “Program” means the Vermont Homelessness Response
2 Continuum.

3 (19) “Rapid rehousing” means short- to medium-term rental assistance
4 and supportive services aimed at assisting a household to quickly exit
5 homelessness.

6 (20) “Shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s shelter
7 standards.

8 (21) “Specialized shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s
9 shelter standards and applicable standards for the delivery of additional
10 services, including health care, mental health services, or services related to
11 substance use disorder.

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

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

15 (B) household needs assessments;

16 (C) case management;

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

18 (E) housing navigation services;

19 (F) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
20 assistance;

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

2 (H) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the
3 household’s housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported
4 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability
5 and independent living advocacy, and referral to health care assistance,
6 including treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorder;

7 (I) progress monitoring of interventions; and

8 (J) services to ensure continuity after a permanent placement.

9 (23) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not
10 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation, including
11 cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or streets.

12 § 2202. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE
13 CONTINUUM

14 (a) The Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum is established to
15 create an array of services that prevent and address homelessness in Vermont.
16 The Program shall be administered by the Department’s Office of Economic
17 Opportunity.

18 (b) The Office shall maintain a continuum of care that is flexible, housing
19 focused, and designed to prevent homelessness whenever possible. The
20 continuum shall prioritize early intervention, rapid resolution of housing crises,
21 and equitable access to emergency and permanent housing.

1 (c) The Program shall:

2 (1) provide temporary emergency housing to eligible households
3 experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness;

4 (2) reduce reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing
5 assistance;

6 (3) expand the use of alternative housing options in partnership with
7 community organizations, municipalities, and private landlords;

8 (4) integrate case management and individualized housing plans into
9 all emergency housing placements; and

10 (5) ensure accountability, transparency, and cost efficiency in the use
11 of public funds.

12 § 2203. CONTINUUM OF CARE COMPONENTS

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

14 (1) level 1: prevention and diversion services;

15 (2) level 2: shelter services:

16 (A) level 2A: highly structured shelter services; and

17 (B) level 2B: low-barrier shelter services;

18 (3) level 3: specialized shelter services;

19 (4) level 4: permanent supportive housing services;

20 (5) level 5: hotels and motels;

1 (A) level 5A: hotels and motels with supportive services; and

2 (B) level 5B: cold weather use of hotels and motels; and

3 (6) other emergency housing services.

4 (b) The Office of Economic Opportunity shall address each of the services
5 in subsection (a) of this section by separate line items in its budget. The
6 Department shall be responsible for any transfers to other Agency of Human
7 Services departments necessary to implement the services listed in subsection
8 (a) of this section. The Department and other departments within the Agency
9 of Human Services shall maximize federal receipts, as applicable, for services
10 listed in subsection (a) of this section.

11 § 2204. PREVENTION AND DIVERSION SERVICES

12 Level 1: prevention and diversion services.

13 (1) Prevention and diversion services shall function as the primary entry
14 point to the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum for all households.
15 The Department shall ensure that prevention and diversion services are
16 provided through an agreement with one or more community partners in each
17 region of the State in a manner that accommodates an eligible household's
18 disability, if any. All households, upon request for assistance, shall receive a
19 standardized prevention and diversion assessment to identify safe alternatives
20 to homelessness and resolve immediate housing barriers.

1 (2) Prevention includes activities to avert entry into homelessness.

2 Diversion includes problem-solving interventions and supports that safely
3 resolve a housing crisis without the use of shelter or hotel placements.

4 (3) Funds administered for prevention and diversion services shall have
5 maximum flexibility.

6 § 2205. SHELTER SERVICES

7 (a) Level 2A: highly structured shelter services.

8 (1) The Department shall determine the need for highly structured
9 shelter services and, to the extent funds permit, develop sufficient highly
10 structured shelter beds to address that need. The Department shall enter into
11 agreements with community partners for the provision of highly structured
12 shelter services for a period of not less than two-years at a time.

13 (2) Highly structured shelters shall provide programming that
14 emphasizes case management, housing stability, employment, education, or
15 treatment services, as well as other services as appropriate, in a manner that
16 accommodates an eligible household’s disability, if any. Eligible households
17 receiving highly structured shelter services shall participate in case
18 management and other services to the extent of the eligible household’s ability.

19 (3) The Department shall ensure that highly structured shelter services
20 meet the Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code
21 (CVR 28-070-001).

1 (4) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met with the level 1
2 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter, highly
3 structured shelter services is the preferred initial placement if capacity,
4 staffing, and geographic accessibility are available

5 (b) Level 2B: low-barrier shelter services.

6 (1) The Department shall determine the need for low-barrier shelter
7 services and, to the extent funds permit, develop sufficient low-barrier shelters
8 to address that need. The Department shall enter into agreements with
9 community partners for the provision of low-barrier shelters for a period of not
10 less than two years at a time.

11 (2) Low-barrier shelters shall minimize barriers to entry by reducing the
12 rules and programmatic requirements found in highly structured shelters, while
13 still providing case management and other housing support services in a
14 manner that accommodates an eligible household’s disability, if any. Stays in
15 low-barrier shelters shall be time limited, and eligible households shall be
16 transitioned to highly structured shelter services or permanent housing as soon
17 as feasible.

18 (3) The Department shall ensure that low-barrier shelter services meet
19 the Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code
20 (CVR 28-070-001).

1 (4) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met with the level 1
2 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter or the highly
3 structured shelter services in subsection (a) of this section, low-barrier shelter
4 services may be utilized if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are
5 available.

6 § 2206. SPECIALIZED SHELTER SERVICES

7 Level 3: specialized services.

8 (1) The relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall
9 determine the need for and, to the extent funds permit, develop specialized
10 shelter services that comply with the Department of Public Safety, Vermont
11 Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR 28-070-001), as well as any other
12 applicable standards relevant to the specialty population. To the extent funds
13 are appropriated for this purpose, the relevant Agency of Human Services
14 departments shall enter into agreements with community partners for the
15 provision of specialized shelter services for a period of not less than two years.

16 (2) Specialized service shelters shall provide services delivered in a
17 highly structured shelter as well as additional specialty services, such as
18 services for substance use disorder and mental and physical health conditions.
19 Eligible households receiving specialized shelter services shall participate in
20 case management and other services to the extent of the eligible household’s
21 ability.

1 (3) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met with the level 1
2 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter or the level 2
3 shelter services in section 2205 of this chapter, a specialized service shelter
4 may be utilized if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are available
5 and the eligible household requires specialized services.

6 § 2207. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

7 Level 4: Permanent supportive housing.

8 (1) The Agency of Human Services or any department within the
9 Agency shall provide or enter an agreement for permanent supportive housing
10 that combines long-term, community-based rental assistance with voluntary,
11 flexible supportive services, such as family supportive housing and other
12 supportive housing services funded in whole or in part by Medicaid.

13 (2) Eligible households receiving permanent supportive housing services
14 shall participate in case management, planning for housing stability, and other
15 services to the extent of the eligible household’s ability.

16 (3) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met with the level 1
17 prevention and diversion services in section 2204 of this chapter, the level 2
18 shelter services in section 2205 of this chapter, or the level 3 specialized
19 shelter services in section 2206 of this chapter, permanent supportive housing
20 may be utilized where capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility are
21 available.

1 § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS

2 (a) Level 5: Hotels and motels generally.

3 (1) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel
4 and motel rooms. However, until sufficient permanent affordable housing or
5 shelter services are available, the use of hotel and motel services shall be
6 permitted.

7 (2) If an eligible household is placed in a hotel or motel pursuant to this
8 section, the Department shall:

9 (A) enter into an agreement with one or more community partners to
10 provide relevant supportive services;

11 (B) permit a population-specific placement to the extent certain
12 populations are not isolated from the wider community served by the Program;
13 and

14 (C) use only hotel and motel rates established by the General
15 Assembly.

16 (3) If an eligible household is placed in a hotel or motel pursuant to this
17 section, the community partners shall enter into agreements for the use of
18 blocks of hotel and motel rooms and negotiate conditions of use for those
19 blocks, including access to providers of case management and other supportive
20 services.

1 (4) A hotel or motel used pursuant to this chapter shall comply with
2 Program rules and the following rules:

3 (A) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule
4 (CVR 13-140-023); and

5 (B) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety
6 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

7 (b) Level 5A: hotels and motels with supportive services.

8 (1) Eligible households placed in a hotel or motel pursuant to this
9 Program shall receive supportive services and participate in case management
10 services, planning for housing stability, and other services to the extent of the
11 eligible household’s ability.

12 (2) The Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of its
13 budget presentation for the General Assembly’s consideration.

14 (3) If an eligible household’s needs cannot be met by levels 1–4 of the
15 continuum as described in sections 2204–2207 of this chapter, the Department
16 may utilize hotels and motels if capacity, staffing, and geographic accessibility
17 are available.

18 (4) The utilization of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this subsection
19 shall be capped at 700 rooms per night.

1 (c) Level 5B: cold weather use of hotel and motels.

2 (1) To the extent funds exist for this purpose, a household shall be
3 placed in general-access hotels and motels if no available option exists within
4 levels 1–5A of the continuum.

5 (2) Annually between December 1 and March 31, households may be
6 placed in general-access hotels and motels. Use of hotels and motels during
7 these months shall only occur if no available option exists within levels 1–5A
8 of the continuum. Services provided pursuant to this subsection shall not occur
9 on a night-by-night basis.

10 (4) The utilization of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this subsection
11 shall be capped at 1,000 rooms per night between December 1 and March 31.

12 § 2209. OTHER EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES

13 (a) Municipal supports. The Department shall provide financial assistance
14 to municipalities in areas of the State with a high volume of unsheltered
15 homelessness, including municipalities underserved by traditional funding
16 sources. The use of this aid is at the discretion of the municipality and
17 includes providing access to basic life-sustaining shelter when the National
18 Weather Service declares a cold weather advisory. Shelter provided pursuant
19 to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a coordinated entry
20 assessment or case management, and shall have minimal data reporting
21 requirements.

1 (b) Emergency cold-weather shelters. Emergency cold-weather shelters
2 shall be managed through an agreement between the Department and one or
3 more community partners to provide overnight, low-barrier shelter when
4 weather conditions warrant. The Department and community partners shall
5 ensure equitable access to emergency cold-weather shelters for communities
6 with a high number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
7 Shelter provided pursuant to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not
8 require a coordinated entry assessment or case management, and shall have
9 minimal data reporting requirements.

10 (c) Alternative Agency of Human Services housing solutions. Independent
11 from this Program, the Agency of Human Services, through its various
12 departments, provides households with other time-limited or permanent
13 housing. Such services include recovery housing, various residential supports
14 for individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, home care
15 services for older Vermonters and individuals with physical disabilities,
16 transitional housing for individuals exiting correctional custody, and residential
17 options for individuals with mental health challenges. Emergency housing
18 provided through the Program is not intended in lieu of access to any other
19 Agency of Human Services time-limited or permanent housing.

1 § 2210. HOUSEHOLD ELIGIBILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES

2 (a) Within the funds appropriated for this purpose, a household shall
3 qualify for services under the Program if the household:

4 (1) is physically present and intends to reside in Vermont as evidenced
5 by active participation in a housing, employment, or other Agency of Human
6 Services–recognized plan;

7 (2) agrees to a coordinated entry assessment that prioritizes the
8 household for permanent housing, unless explicitly exempt under this chapter;

9 (3) engages with a lead case management entity, such as a department of
10 the Agency of Human Services or an authorized community partner, to
11 develop a housing plan and participate in employment, treatment, or other
12 activities as appropriate, unless explicitly exempt from case management
13 requirements under this chapter; and

14 (4) abides by program rules and refrains from misconduct.

15 (b)(1) A household that knowingly provides false, misleading, or
16 incomplete information regarding residency, disability status, household
17 composition, or other eligibility criteria shall be subject to termination of
18 services within five days after receiving written notice from the Department or
19 a community partner.

1 (2) The Department may refer cases of suspected fraud to the Office of
2 the Attorney General or a State’s Attorney for investigation and prosecution
3 under applicable State law.

4 (3) The Department or a community partner shall provide clear written
5 notice to all applicants regarding penalties for fraud at the time of application.

6 (4) The Department or a community partner shall not impose a penalty
7 upon a household for a good faith, immaterial error that was corrected upon
8 notice within a reasonable period of time.

9 (c) An eligible household engaged in criminal activity or misconduct that is
10 not related to a disability may be subject to immediate termination of services
11 as necessary for the safety of the household, other households, or staff.

12 (d) As used in this section, “misconduct” means documented behaviors that
13 materially endanger the safety of others, involve the destruction of property, or
14 constitute illegal activity. “Misconduct” may include repeated refusal of
15 suitable placements following documented suitability assessments and
16 reasonable accommodations.

17 § 2211. PRIORITIZATION

18 (a) The Department, either directly or through community partners, shall
19 prioritize services within the funds appropriated for this purpose to eligible
20 households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and have a
21 member who:

1 (1) is 65 years of age or older;

2 (2) has a disability;

3 (3) is a minor child;

4 (4) is pregnant; or

5 (5) is experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault,

6 stalking, human trafficking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions.

7 (b)(1) Proof of an eligible household’s disability shall be verified by:

8 (A) a health care provider licensed or certified and practicing in

9 Vermont;

10 (B) a determination or certification from a State- or federally-

11 recognized agency or program that provides services to individuals with

12 disabilities; or

13 (C) self-attestation by the eligible household, subject to verification

14 by the State or community partner within 30 days when other documentation is

15 not reasonably available at the time of application.

16 (2) The presence of an eligible household member’s disability shall be

17 verified by the Department or a community partner during the household’s

18 initial application process and shall be redetermined annually if the household

19 is still receiving services. An eligible household with a member who has a

20 lifelong disability, such as an intellectual or developmental disability, shall not

21 be required to have the disability redetermined.

1 (c) The Department and community partners shall comply with the
2 Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101–12213, and section 504 of
3 the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, for the purposes of providing
4 reasonable modifications, effective communication, and accessible placements.
5 Program rules and case management requirements shall be reasonably
6 modified as necessary to avoid discrimination against eligible households with
7 a member who has a disability.

8 § 2212. TIME LIMITS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

9 (a) Time limits for Program participation shall be governed by the level of
10 service provided as follows:

11 (1) level 1: any temporary housing provided through the Program’s
12 prevention and diversion services shall not exceed 30 days per rolling
13 12-month period;

14 (2) level 2: the Department, in collaboration with shelter providers,
15 shall establish the maximum length of stay in highly structured shelters and
16 low-barrier shelters in rule;

17 (3) level 3: the Department, in collaboration with other relevant Agency
18 of Human Services’ departments, shall establish the maximum length of stay in
19 specialized shelters in rule;

1 (4) level 4: permanent supportive housing services may be utilized by
2 an eligible household for as long as the eligible household’s plan indicates it is
3 necessary; and

4 (5) level 5: hotels and motels:

5 (A) level 5A: eligible households may receive housing at hotels and
6 motels with supportive services for not more than 70 days per rolling 12-month
7 period; and

8 (B) level 5B: eligible households may receive continual services in
9 cold-weather-use hotels and motels between December 1 and March 31.

10 (b) The Department may grant extensions to the time limits established in
11 subsection (a) of this section pursuant to criteria adopted in rule, including for:

12 (1) an eligible household actively awaiting a placement in housing,
13 treatment, or other services;

14 (2) medical necessity;

15 (3) lack of reasonable alternative accessible placements for a member of
16 the eligible household with a disability; and

17 (4) imminent risk to the health or safety of one or more of the eligible
18 household’s members.

19 § 2213. CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

20 A lead case management entity shall provide case management services to
21 all eligible households participating in the Program, except where specifically

1 exempted for certain services. Case management services provided pursuant to
2 this chapter shall be informed by the acuity level of the eligible household and
3 include individualized supports that connect an eligible household to public
4 assistance health care, employment, permanent housing, and other services.
5 Each eligible household shall be assigned a lead case management entity,
6 which may be from any Agency of Human Services department or a
7 community partner.

8 **§ 2214. NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

9 Every fifth year beginning in 2028, the Department shall contract with an
10 organization to conduct a needs assessment that identifies gaps in services for
11 homeless households in the State and includes recommendations to ensure the
12 provision of equitable services throughout the State.

13 **§ 2215. NOTICE; APPEALS; RIGHT TO FAIR HEARING**

14 **(a) The Department or a community partner shall provide written notice to**
15 **any applicant or household whose participation in the Program is denied,**
16 **reduced, suspended, or terminated. Notice shall include:**

17 **(1) the specific factual and legal basis for the Department or community**
18 **partner's decision;**

19 **(2) the effective date of the action, which in the case of termination,**
20 **reduction, or suspension of services shall not be sooner than 14 days after the**
21 **date of the written notice;**

1 (3) a statement of the right to request a fair hearing pursuant to this
2 section; and

3 (4) clear instructions, in plain language, on the process and deadlines for
4 filing an appeal.

5 (b) An applicant for or a recipient of assistance pursuant to this chapter
6 may file a request for a fair hearing with the Human Services Board pursuant
7 to 3 V.S.A. § 3091 when:

8 (1) an application for assistance under the Program is denied in whole or
9 part;

10 (2) a household's benefits are terminated, reduced, or suspended; or

11 (3) the household believes that benefits have not been provided in
12 accordance with applicable rules or policies.

13 (c) An applicant or household shall file a request for a fair hearing with the
14 Human Services Board within 60 days following the date that the applicant or
15 household received written notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this section.

16 (d) If a household files a request for a fair hearing within 10 days after
17 receiving notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Department or
18 community partner providing notice shall continue to provide services under
19 the Program without interruption until a decision is issued by the Human
20 Services Board, unless the household voluntarily waives continued services.

1 (e) Hearing shall be conducting in accordance with due process standards,
2 including the right to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses, and be
3 represented by counsel or another authorized representative.

4 (f) The Human Services Board shall issue a written decision that sets forth
5 findings of fact, conclusions of law, and the basis for its decision, and the
6 process for appealing the decision to the Vermont Supreme Court.

7 (g) If the Human Services Board issues 20 substantially identical
8 decisions brought by Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum applicants
9 or recipients, the Department and community partners shall adopt the Board’s
10 interpretation as part of its administration of the Program and the Department
11 shall revise the Program rules accordingly.

12 § 2216. RULEMAKING

13 The Department shall adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 for the
14 implementation of the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum,
15 addressing at a minimum:

16 (1) requirements for community providers participating in the Program;

17 (2) standards for highly structured, low-barrier, and specialized shelters;

18 (3) documentation requirements for household eligibility, including
19 disability;

20 (4) required elements for supportive services, including case
21 management;

1 (5) the creation of a standard application form that may be completed by
2 hand, electronically, or by telephone;

3 (6) a process for issuing timely, written approval or denial notifications
4 to applicants;

5 (7) a process for issuing advanced notice to households when the
6 household is being terminated from the program;

7 (8) applicant and household appeal procedures;

8 (9) time limits for Program participation, including procedures for
9 extensions;

10 (10) expectations for Departmental oversight and quality monitoring;
11 and

12 (11) other areas as deemed necessary.

13 § 2217. REPORTING

14 (a) Annually, the Department shall submit a written report to the House
15 Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and
16 Welfare addressing each of the services in the continuum with regard to the
17 following:

18 TBD

19 (b) Annually, as part of the Department’s budget presentation, the
20 Department shall set goals for increased housing capacity, including permanent
21 supportive housing, permanent affordable housing, and shelter beds. The

1 Department shall provide data pertaining to the increased shelter capacity and
2 the extent to which shelter capacity meets the needs of eligible households
3 experiencing homelessness each year.

4 * * * Continuums of Care; Required Merger * * *

5 Sec. 5. MERGER OF CONTINUUMS OF CARE

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

12 (b) On or before January 15, 2028, the Office shall submit a written report
13 to the House Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on
14 Health and Welfare summarizing efforts to establish a single continuum of care
15 pursuant to this section.

16 * * * Effective October 1, 2028, Requirements of Grantees * * *

17 Sec. 6. 33 V.S.A. § 2218 is added to read:

18 § 2218. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

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

- 1 (1) participate in the local housing coalition or other group established
- 2 to assist eligible households who are homeless;
- 3 (2) utilize the coordinated entry assessment for eligible households who
- 4 are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- 5 (3) utilize service plan options;
- 6 (4) utilize the appropriate planning process for an eligible household
- 7 transitioning into permanent housing, including for eligible households with an
- 8 individual who has an intellectual or developmental disability, older
- 9 Vermonters, or individuals transitioning from a correctional facility; and
- 10 (5) measure performance outcomes, including diversion success, time-
- 11 to-housing, and housing retention.

12 *** Transition; Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum ***

13 **Sec. 7. TRANSITION TO THE VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE**

14 **CONTINUUM**

15 Recognizing that the Department and community partners do not have the

16 capacity to fully implement the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum

17 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 on July 1, 2027, the Department and

18 community partners shall implement the Program to the fullest extent of their

19 ability in fiscal year 2027 while developing the capacity to fully implement the

20 Program on July 1, 2028.

21 **Sec. 8. DEADLINE FOR ADOPTION OF PERMANENT RULES;**

1 INTERIM EMERGENCY RULEMAKING

2 (a) Unless extended by the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules
3 pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 843(c), the Department shall, on or before October 1,
4 2027, adopt permanent rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 on the Vermont
5 Homelessness Response Continuum as required by 33 V.S.A. § 2216.

6 (b) Pending the adoption of permanent rules on the Vermont Homelessness
7 Response Continuum, the Commissioner for Children and Families shall adopt
8 and maintain emergency rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 844, which shall be
9 deemed to meet the standard for emergency rulemaking pursuant to 3 V.S.A.
10 § 844(a). Emergency rules required by this subsection shall take effect on July
11 1, 2026 and shall, at a minimum, address the required topics listed in 33 V.S.A.
12 § 2216.

13 Sec. 9. STATUS REPORT; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE
14 CONTINUUM

15 On or before January 15, 2027, the Department for Children and Families'
16 Office of Economic Opportunity shall submit a written report to the House
17 Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and
18 Welfare describing the Office's preparations to implement the Vermont
19 Homelessness Response Continuum established pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter
20 22. The Office's status report shall include an initial draft of the Department's

1 permanent rules for implementation of the Vermont Homelessness Response
2 Continuum and any recommendations for legislative action.

3 * * * Supportive and Shelter Services for Households Experiencing Domestic
4 or Sexual Violence * * *

5 Sec. 10. 33 V.S.A. chapter 6 is amended to read:

6 CHAPTER 6. PREVENTION AND TREATMENT OF SEXUAL ABUSE
7 AND DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

8 * * *

9 § 602. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES AND SHELTER FOR HOUSEHOLDS
10 EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE

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

1 this section, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that there
2 is not a gap in services.

3 * * * Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program * * *

4 **Sec. 11. VERMONT RENTAL ASSISTANCE BRIDGE PROGRAM**

5 (a) The Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program is established within
6 the Vermont State Housing Authority for the purpose of linking households
7 who require rental assistance to permanent housing when the household does
8 not otherwise have access to relevant U.S. Department of Housing and Urban
9 Development rental assistance. The Program shall be accessible to eligible
10 clients served by each of the Agency of Human Services' departments.

11 (b) The Program shall be available to a household for not more than 24
12 months and shall not provide the full amount of the household's rental
13 payment. Program payments shall be made directly from the Vermont State
14 Housing Authority to a household's landlord.

15 (c) Program priority shall be given to current recipients of the HOME
16 Program, established pursuant to 10 V.S.A. § 321(b)(2), who have not yet
17 reached 24 months of rental assistance.

18 (d) The Vermont State Housing Authority and relevant departments of the
19 Agency of Human Services shall jointly work to:

20 (1) incorporate any existing rental assistance funded by the Agency and
21 its department into the Program established in this section; and

1 (2) establish eligibility criteria and any prioritization that may be
2 necessary for this use of funds appropriated for this Program.

3 (e) It is the intent of the General Assembly that funds are appropriated for
4 the Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program through fiscal year 2030.

5 * * * Payment Rate Structure and Fiscal Year 2027 Appropriations * * *

6 Sec. **12.** PAYMENT RATE STRUCTURE; SHELTER SERVICES

7 On or before July 1, 2027, the Department, in collaboration with the
8 Agency of Human Services and relevant community partners, shall establish a
9 payment rate structure for all shelter services required by this act. The
10 structure shall include a base rate and a supplemental payment for specialized
11 shelter services. It is not the intent of the General Assembly that the payment
12 rate structure established pursuant to this section cover the full operating
13 expenses of shelters throughout the State.

14 Sec. **13.** APPROPRIATION; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE
15 CONTINUUM

16 (a)(1) In fiscal year 2027, \$82,634,153.00 is appropriated from the General
17 Fund for the provision of services, implementation of the Vermont
18 Homelessness Response Continuum, shelter development and operation, rental
19 assistance, and supportive services, including case management, as follows:

20 (A) \$X for prevention and diversion services, which comprises \$X
21 one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

1 (B) \$X for the shelter development and services, which comprises \$X
2 one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

3 (C) \$X for specialized shelter development and services, which
4 comprises \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

5 (D) \$X for permanent supportive housing, which comprises \$X one-
6 time funding and \$X from the base budget;

7 (E) \$X for rental assistance, which comprises \$X one-time funding
8 and \$X from the base budget;

9 (F) \$X for emergency housing in hotels and motels, which comprises
10 \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget;

11 (G) \$X for other supportive services and case management, which
12 comprises \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget; and

13 (H) \$X for the Housing Opportunity Grant Program, which
14 comprises \$X one-time funding and \$X from the base budget.

15 (2) In fiscal year 2027, the following appropriations are made from the
16 General Fund:

17 (A) \$X for supportive services and shelter for households
18 experiencing domestic and sexual violence; and

19 (B) \$X for the Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program.

1 (3) Any funds that remain unspent at the end of fiscal year 2027 shall be
2 carried forward for the same purpose for which they were originally
3 appropriated in this section.

4 **(b) Any funds appropriated for General Assistance emergency housing or**
5 **the Housing Opportunity Grant Program that remain unspent at the end of**
6 **fiscal year 2026 shall be carried forward for investment in the Vermont**
7 **Homelessness Response Continuum in fiscal year 2027.**

8 * * * Removing General Assistance Annual Report * * *

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

10 § 2115. ~~GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REPORT~~

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

16 ~~(1) an evaluation of the General Assistance program during the previous~~
17 ~~fiscal year;~~

18 ~~(2) any recommendations for changes to the program;~~

19 ~~(3) a plan for continued implementation of the program;~~

20 ~~(4) statewide statistics using deidentified data related to the use of emergency~~
21 ~~housing vouchers during the preceding State fiscal year, including~~

1 ~~demographic information, client data, shelter and motel usage rates, clients'~~
2 ~~primary stated cause of homelessness, and average lengths of stay in~~
3 ~~emergency housing by demographic group and by type of housing; and~~
4 ~~(5) other information the Commissioner deems appropriate. [Repealed.]~~

* * * Effective Dates * * *

6 Sec. 15. EFFECTIVE DATES

7 (a) This section and section 8 (deadline for adoption of permanent rules;
8 interim emergency rulemaking) act shall take effect on passage.

9 (b) Sec. 6 (grant requirements) shall take effect on October 1, 2028.

10 (c) All remaining sections shall take effect on July 1, 2026.