

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 services; 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) “Highly structured shelter” means a shelter that provides  
6           programming that emphasizes case management, housing stability,  
7           employment, education, or treatment services, as well as other services as  
8           appropriate, in a manner that accommodates an eligible household’s disability,  
9           if any.

10          (13) “Homeless” means:

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

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

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

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

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

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

20          (15) “Low-barrier shelter” means a shelter that minimizes barriers to  
21           entry by reducing the rules and programmatic requirements found in highly

1 structured shelters, while still providing case management and other housing  
2 support services in a manner that accommodates an eligible household's  
3 disability, if any.

4 (16) “Minor child” means an individual under 18 years of age.

5 (17) “Office” means of the Office of Economic Opportunity.

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

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

11 (20) “Program” means the Vermont Homelessness Response  
12 Continuum.

13 (21) “Rapid rehousing” means short- to medium-term rental assistance  
14 and supportive services aimed at assisting a household to quickly exit  
15 homelessness.

16 (22) “Shelter” means a facility that meets the Department’s shelter  
17 standards.

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

1           (24) “Supportive services” means individualized supports that assist a  
2 household in obtaining and maintaining housing, including:

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

4           (B) household needs assessments;

5           (C) case management;

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

7           (E) housing navigation services;

8           (F) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial  
9 assistance;

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

11           (H) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the

12 household’s housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported  
13 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability  
14 and independent living advocacy, and referral to health care assistance,  
15 including treatment for mental health conditions and substance use disorder;

16           (I) progress monitoring of interventions; and

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

18           (25) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not  
19 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation, including  
20 cars, parks, abandoned buildings, or streets.

1     § 2202. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

2             CONTINUUM

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

7             (b) The Office shall maintain a continuum of services 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 to emergency and permanent housing.

11            (c) The Program shall:

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

14                (2) reduce reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing  
15                assistance;

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

18                (4) integrate case management and individualized housing plans into  
19                all emergency housing placements; and

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

1     § 2203. **PROGRAM** COMPONENTS

2         (a) The continuum of **services** shall consist of the following:

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

4             (2) level 2: shelter services:

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

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

7             (3) level 3: specialized shelter services;

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

9             (5) level 5: hotels and motels;

10            (6) other emergency housing services.

11         (b) The Office shall address each of the services in subsection (a) of this  
12         section by separate line items in its budget. The Department shall be  
13         responsible for any transfers to other Agency of Human Services departments  
14         necessary to implement the services listed in subsection (a) of this section.  
15         The Department and other departments within the Agency of Human Services  
16         shall maximize federal receipts, as applicable, for services listed in subsection  
17         (a) of this section.

18         (c) Upon assessing a household's needs, the Office or community partners  
19         shall place the household in the appropriate level of care to address the  
20         household's specific needs.

1     § 2204. PREVENTION AND DIVERSION SERVICES

2         Level 1: prevention and diversion services.

3             (1) Prevention and diversion services shall function as the primary entry  
4 point to the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum for all households,  
5 although connection may be made at any level. The Office shall ensure that  
6 prevention and diversion services are provided through an agreement with one  
7 or more community partners in each region of the State in a manner that  
8 accommodates an eligible household’s disability, if any. All households, upon  
9 request for assistance, shall receive a brief, standardized initial prevention and  
10 diversion assessment to identify safe alternatives to homelessness and resolve  
11 immediate housing barriers.

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

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

15             (3) Funds administered for prevention and diversion services shall have  
16 maximum flexibility.

17     § 2205. SHELTER SERVICES

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

19             (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office shall  
20 determine the need for highly structured shelter services and develop sufficient  
21 highly structured shelter beds to address that need. The Department through

1 the Office shall enter into agreements with community partners for the  
2 provision of highly structured shelter services for a period of not less than two-  
3 years at a time.

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

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

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

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

18 (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose, the Office shall  
19 determine the need for low-barrier shelter services and develop sufficient low-  
20 barrier shelters to address that need. The Department through the Office shall

1 enter into agreements with community partners for the provision of low-barrier  
2 shelters for a period of not less than two years at a time.

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

10 (3) The Office shall ensure that low-barrier shelter services meet the  
11 Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR  
12 28-070-001).

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

18 § 2206. SPECIALIZED SHELTER SERVICES

19 Level 3: specialized services.

20 (1) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose:

1           (A) the relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall  
2           determine the need for and, to the extent funds permit, develop specialized  
3           shelter services that comply with the Department of Public Safety, Vermont  
4           Fire and Building Safety Code (CVR 28-070-001), as well as any other  
5           applicable standards relevant to the specialty population; and

6           (B) the relevant Agency of Human Services departments shall enter  
7           into agreements with community partners for the provision of specialized  
8           shelter services for a period of not less than two years.

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

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

1     § 2207. PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

2             Level 4: Permanent supportive housing.

3             (1) The Agency of Human Services or any department within the  
4             Agency shall provide or enter an agreement for permanent supportive housing  
5             that combines long-term, community-based rental assistance with voluntary,  
6             flexible supportive services, such as family supportive housing and other  
7             supportive housing services funded in whole or in part by Medicaid, if the  
8             household and services are eligible for Medicaid.

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

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

18     § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS

19             Level 5: Hotels and motels.

20             (1) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel  
21             and motel rooms. However, until sufficient permanent affordable housing or

1 shelter services are available, the use of hotel and motel services shall be  
2 permitted.

3 (2) If a hotel or motel is utilized pursuant to this section, the Department  
4 shall:

5 (A) enter into an agreement with one or more community partners to  
6 provide relevant supportive services to eligible households;

7 (B) permit a population-specific placement to the extent certain  
8 populations are not isolated from the wider community served through the  
9 Program;

10 (C) propose hotel and motel rates as part of its budget presentation  
11 for the General Assembly’s consideration;

12 (D) use only hotel and motel rates established by the General  
13 Assembly;

14 (E) enter into agreements for the use of blocks of hotel and motel  
15 rooms and negotiate conditions of use for those blocks, including access to  
16 providers of case management and other supportive services, with space to  
17 provide services as negotiated; and

18 (F) ensure that services are not provided pursuant to this subsection  
19 on a night-by-night basis.

1           (3) If a hotel or motel is utilized pursuant to this section, the eligible  
2 household shall participate in case management services, planning for housing  
3 stability, and other services to the extent of the eligible household’s ability.

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

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

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

10           (5) To the extent funds are appropriated for this purpose:

11                   (A) between April 1 and November 30 of each year, the utilization of  
12 hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this section shall be capped at 700 rooms  
13 per night; and

14                   (B) between December 1 and March 31 of each year, the utilization  
15 of hotel and motel rooms pursuant to this section shall be capped at 1,000  
16 rooms per night.

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

1        § 2209. OTHER EMERGENCY HOUSING SERVICES

2            (a) Municipal supports. The Department through the Office shall provide  
3        grants to municipalities in areas of the State with a high volume of unsheltered  
4        homelessness, including municipalities underserved by traditional funding  
5        sources. The use of this aid is at the discretion of the municipality and  
6        includes providing access to basic life-sustaining shelter when the National  
7        Weather Service declares a cold weather advisory. Shelter provided pursuant  
8        to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a coordinated entry  
9        assessment or case management, and shall have minimal data reporting  
10       requirements.

11           (b) Emergency cold-weather shelters. Emergency cold-weather shelters  
12        shall be managed through an agreement between the Office and one or more  
13        community partners to provide overnight, low-barrier shelter when weather  
14        conditions warrant. The Office and community partners shall ensure equitable  
15        access to emergency cold-weather shelters for communities with a high  
16        number of households experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Shelter  
17        provided pursuant to this subsection shall be time limited, shall not require a  
18        coordinated entry assessment or case management, and shall have minimal  
19        data reporting requirements.

20           (c) Alternative Agency of Human Services housing solutions. The Agency  
21        of Human Services, through its various departments, provides households with

1 other time-limited or permanent housing. Such services include recovery  
2 housing, various residential supports for individuals with intellectual or  
3 developmental disabilities, home care services for older Vermonters and  
4 individuals with physical disabilities, transitional housing for individuals  
5 exiting correctional custody, and residential options for individuals with  
6 mental health challenges. Emergency housing provided through the Program  
7 is not intended in lieu of access to any other Agency of Human Services time-  
8 limited or permanent housing.

9 § 2210. HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES

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

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

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

17 (3) engages with a lead case management entity, such as a department of  
18 the Agency of Human Services or a community partner, to develop a housing  
19 plan and participate in employment, treatment, or other activities as  
20 appropriate, unless explicitly exempt from case management requirements  
21 under this chapter; and

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

2           (b)(1) The Office or a community partner shall provide clear written notice  
3 to all applicants regarding penalties for fraud at the time of application.

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

7           (3) A household that knowingly provides false, misleading, or  
8 incomplete information regarding residency, disability status, household  
9 composition, or other eligibility criteria shall be subject to termination of  
10 services within 30 days after receiving written notice from the Department or a  
11 community partner.

12           (4) Pending the outcome of a relevant Human Services Board hearing,  
13 the Office may refer cases of suspected fraud to the Office of the Attorney  
14 General or a State’s Attorney for investigation and prosecution under  
15 applicable State law.

16           (c) A household may be terminated from the Program for repeatedly  
17 refusing suitable placements following documented suitability assessments and  
18 reasonable accommodations.

19           (d) A member or members of an eligible household engaged in misconduct  
20 that is not related to a disability or criminal activity may be subject to  
21 immediate termination of services as necessary for the safety of others.

1 (e) As used in this section, “misconduct” means documented behaviors that  
2 materially endanger the safety of others, involve the intentional destruction of  
3 property, or constitute illegal activity.

4 § 2211. PRIORITIZATION

5 (a) The Office, either directly or through community partners, shall  
6 prioritize services within the funds appropriated for this purpose to eligible  
7 households who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and have a  
8 member who:

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

10 (2) has a disability;

11 (3) is a minor child;

12 (4) is pregnant;

13 (5) is experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault,  
14 stalking, human trafficking, or other dangerous or life-threatening conditions;

15 or

16 (6) has experienced constructive eviction.

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

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

19 Vermont;

1           (B) a determination or certification from a State- or federally-  
2           recognized agency or program that provides services to individuals with  
3           disabilities; or

4           (C) self-attestation by the eligible household, subject to verification  
5           by the State or community partner within 30 days when other documentation is  
6           not reasonably available at the time of application.

7           (2) The presence of an eligible household member’s disability shall be  
8           verified by the Office or a community partner during the household’s initial  
9           application process and shall be redetermined annually if the household is still  
10           receiving services. An eligible household with a member who has a lifelong  
11           disability, such as an intellectual or developmental disability, shall not be  
12           required to have the disability redetermined.

13           (c) The Office and community partners shall comply with the Americans  
14           with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. § 12101–12213, and section 504 of the  
15           Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794, for the purposes of providing  
16           reasonable modifications, effective communication, and accessible placements.  
17           Program rules and case management requirements shall be reasonably  
18           modified, including the use of plain language, as necessary to avoid  
19           discrimination against eligible households with a member who has a disability.

1     § 2212. TIME LIMITS FOR PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

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

4             (1) level 1: any temporary housing that is not provided in the form of  
5     temporary rental assistance through the Program’s prevention and diversion  
6     services shall not exceed 30 days per rolling 12-month period;

7             (2) level 2: the Office, in collaboration with shelter providers, shall  
8     establish the maximum length of stay in highly structured shelters and low-  
9     barrier shelters in rule or shelter standards;

10            (3) level 3: the Department, in collaboration with other relevant Agency  
11    of Human Services’ departments, shall establish the maximum length of stay in  
12    specialized shelters in rule or shelter standards;

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

16            (5) level 5: hotels and motels:

17            (A) between April 1 and November 30 of each year, eligible  
18    households may receive housing at hotels and motels with supportive services  
19    for not more than 70 days per rolling 12-month period; and

1           (B) between December 1 and March 31 of each year, eligible  
2           households may receive continual services in cold-weather-use hotels and  
3           motels.

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

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

8           (2) medical necessity;

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

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

13          § 2213. CASE MANAGEMENT SERVICES

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

1     § 2214. NEEDS ASSESSMENT

2         The Office and community partners shall provide advice and consultation to  
3     the Department of Housing and Community Development in its completion of  
4     a needs assessment that identifies gaps in services for households that are  
5     homeless in the State and includes recommendations to ensure the provision of  
6     equitable services throughout the State.

7     § 2215. NOTICE; APPEALS; RIGHT TO FAIR HEARING

8         (a) The Office or a community partner shall provide written notice to any  
9     applicant or household whose participation in the Program is denied, reduced,  
10    suspended, or terminated. Notice shall include:

11             (1) the specific factual and legal basis for the Office or community  
12    partner's decision;

13             (2) the effective date of the action, which in the case of termination,  
14    reduction, or suspension of services shall not be sooner than 30 days after the  
15    date of the written notice, in the household's preferred method of  
16    communication;

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

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

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

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

6            (2) a household’s benefits are terminated, reduced, or suspended; or

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

9        (c) An applicant or household shall file a request for a fair hearing with the  
10       Human Services Board within 60 days following the date that the applicant or  
11       household after the date of the written notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this  
12       section.

13       (d) If a household files a request for a fair hearing within 14 days after  
14       receiving notice pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, the Office or  
15       community partner providing notice shall continue to provide services under  
16       the Program without interruption until a decision is issued by the Human  
17       Services Board, unless:

18            (1) the household voluntarily waives continued services; or

19            (2) a household member’s or members’ continued receipt of services  
20       poses a risk of safety to others.

1       (e) The hearing shall be conducted in accordance with due process  
2       standards, including the right to present evidence, cross-examine witnesses,  
3       and be 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 decisions  
8       brought by Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum applicants or  
9       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 brief, standardized initial assessment form that may  
2           be completed by 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 the Office's oversight and quality monitoring; and

11          (11) other subjects as deemed necessary.

12          § 2217. REPORTING

13          (a) Annually, as part of the Office's budget presentation, the Office shall  
14          provide a status report addressing each level of the Vermont Homeless  
15          Response Continuum. Minimally, the status report shall address:

16               (1) the number of households served within each level of the continuum;

17               (2) the average length of participation for households within each level  
18               of the continuum and the rate at which households successfully transition to  
19               permanent housing;

20               (3) the number of households diverted from entering shelters or hotel  
21               and motel placements through prevention and diversion services;

- 1           (4) the utilization of hotels and motels, including:
- 2                   (A) the average nightly number of rooms used;
- 3                   (B) the average and median length of stay; and
- 4                   (C) the extent to which hotel and motel usage has decreased relative  
5 to the prior fiscal year;
- 6           (5) housing stability outcomes, including rates of return to homelessness  
7 within six and 12 months following exit from the Program;
- 8           (6) an assessment of regional capacity and access to services, including  
9 identification of geographic areas with unmet needs or disproportionate  
10 utilization of emergency housing resources;
- 11           (7) total expenditures by continuum level and funding source, including  
12 State, federal, and other funds, and an analysis of cost efficiency across  
13 housing models; and
- 14           (8) any operational barriers to implementation of the continuum, along  
15 with recommendations for administrative or legislative action.
- 16           (b) Annually, as part of the Department’s budget presentation, the  
17 Department shall set goals for increased housing capacity, including permanent  
18 supportive housing, permanent affordable housing, and shelter beds. The  
19 Department shall provide data pertaining to the increased shelter capacity and  
20 the extent to which shelter capacity meets the needs of eligible households  
21 experiencing homelessness each year.

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

2           Sec. 5. MERGER OF CONTINUUMS OF CARE

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

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

13                               \* \* \* Effective October 1, 2028, Requirements of Grantees \* \* \*

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

15           § 2218. GRANT REQUIREMENTS

16           Any grant or other agreement executed by the Agency of Human Services  
17           or its departments shall require a community partner, as appropriate, to:

18                   (1) participate in the local housing coalition or other group established  
19           to assist eligible households who are homeless;

20                   (2) utilize the coordinated entry assessment for eligible households who  
21           are homeless or at risk of homelessness;

1           (3) utilize the appropriate planning process and options for an eligible  
2           household transitioning into permanent housing, including for eligible  
3           households with an individual who has an intellectual or developmental  
4           disability, older Vermonters, or individuals transitioning from a correctional  
5           facility or hospital; and

6           (4) measure performance outcomes, including diversion success, time-  
7           to-housing, and housing retention.

8           \* \* \* Transition; Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum \* \* \*

9           Sec. 7. TRANSITION TO THE VERMONT HOMLESSNESS RESPONSE  
10           CONTINUUM

11           Recognizing that the Department and community partners do not have the  
12           capacity to fully implement the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum  
13           established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 on July 1, 2026, the Department through  
14           the Office and community partners shall implement the Program to the fullest  
15           extent of their ability in fiscal year 2027 while developing the capacity to fully  
16           implement the Program in fiscal year 2028.

17           Sec. 8. INTERIM EMERGENCY RULEMAKING; DEADLINE FOR  
18           ADOPTION OF PERMANENT RULES

19           (a) Pending the adoption of permanent rules on the Vermont Homelessness  
20           Response Continuum, the Commissioner for Children and Families shall adopt  
21           and maintain emergency rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 844, which shall be

1 deemed to meet the standard for emergency rulemaking pursuant to 3 V.S.A.  
2 § 844(a). Emergency rules required by this subsection shall take effect on July  
3 1, 2026 and shall, at a minimum, address the required topics listed in 33 V.S.A.  
4 § 2216.

5 **(b)** Unless extended by the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules  
6 pursuant to 3 V.S.A. § 843(c), the Department shall, on or before October 1,  
7 2027, adopt permanent rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25 on the Vermont  
8 Homelessness Response Continuum as required by 33 V.S.A. § 2216.

9 Sec. 9. STATUS REPORT; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

10 CONTINUUM

11 On or before February 15, 2027, the Department for Children and Families’  
12 Office of Economic Opportunity shall submit a written report to the House  
13 Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and  
14 Welfare describing the Office’s **implementation process for** the Vermont  
15 Homelessness Response Continuum established pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter  
16 22. The Office’s status report shall include an initial draft of the Department’s  
17 permanent rules for implementation of the Vermont Homelessness Response  
18 Continuum and any recommendations for legislative action.



1                   \* \* \* Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program \* \* \*

2           Sec. 11. VERMONT RENTAL ASSISTANCE BRIDGE PROGRAM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4       Sec. 12. PAYMENT RATE STRUCTURE; SHELTER SERVICES

5       The Department for Children and Families, in collaboration with the  
6       Agency of Human Services and relevant community partners, shall establish a  
7       payment rate structure, including periodic rate reviews, for all shelter services  
8       required by this act. The structure shall include a base rate and a supplemental  
9       payment for specialized shelter services. On or before April 1, 2027, the

10       Department shall submit a report to the House Committee on Human Services  
11       and to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare regarding the  
12       implementation and the Department’s proposed timeline for implementation.

13       Sec. 13. APPROPRIATION; VERMONT HOMELESSNESS RESPONSE

14           CONTINUUM

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

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

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

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

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

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

9           (6) \$X for rental assistance, which comprises \$X one-time funding and  
10          \$X from the base budget;

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

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

15          (9) \$X for supportive services and shelter for households experiencing  
16          domestic and sexual violence; and

17          (10) \$X for the Vermont Rental Assistance Bridge Program.

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

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

5                                \* \* \* Removing General Assistance Annual Report \* \* \*

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

7        § 2115. ~~GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM REPORT~~

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

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

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

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

17                ~~(4) statewide statistics using deidentified data related to the use of~~  
18        ~~emergency housing vouchers during the preceding State fiscal year, including~~  
19        ~~demographic information, client data, shelter and motel usage rates, clients'~~  
20        ~~primary stated cause of homelessness, and average lengths of stay in~~  
21        ~~emergency housing by demographic group and by type of housing; and~~

