



Written Testimony – Response to 26-0766 Draft 4.1

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Thank you to the committee for continuing to address homelessness in Vermont and for the opportunity to share the Vermont Network's response to 26-0766 Draft 4.1.

We appreciate the attention to meeting shelter needs of survivors of domestic and sexual violence. We highly recommend that the funding and framework of our existing program continue into the future. We support codifying this framework into law, as was contemplated in H.91 last year.

Comments on 26-0766 Draft 4.1

We offer the comments and requested changes below and would welcome the opportunity to testify.

- **Fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence - Sec 4 (12) (C) page 6, line 8:**

We understand that the bill is aligning with HUD homeless definitions. HUD definitions include a further [clarified definition](#) of domestic violence which we request to be included:

(C) fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence, [dating violence, sexual assault, stalking and other dangerous or life-threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or family member that either takes place in, or they are afraid to return to, their primary nighttime residence.](#)

- **Eligibility & Responsibilities- Sec 4 § 2210 page 19, lines 12-13:**

Thank you for the language indicating possible exemptions from case management. It is important that our services are **explicitly exempt so as to not jeopardize the federal funding our Member Organizations receive**. The federal Violence Against Women Act and the [Family Violence Prevention and Services Act statutes](#) requires that services are voluntary. **Survivors cannot be mandated** to participate in supportive services and no conditions can be placed on survivors of domestic and sexual violence in order to access or continue receiving emergency shelter. We request the following change:

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



- **Eligibility & Responsibilities- Sec 4 § 2210 (c), page 20, lines 9-11:**

While the new response continuum and its eligibility requirements would allow for immediate termination due to criminal activity, we must consider the unintended consequences for survivors. Often, survivors face criminal charges for actions taken in self-defense or under duress from an abuser. We recognize that criminalizing survivors is not the committee's intent. To ensure clarity and protection for survivors, we propose the following distinction:

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

- **Shelter services for survivors - Sec 10 page 31 and 32**

We support the desire to codify our relationship with OEO to serve survivors. Since the end of the 2025 legislative session, we have had a contract with OEO to provide shelter services to survivors. The language in section 10 should be revised to remove conditions that are instead addressed in state contracts. We request that lines 15-20 on page 31 are deleted and replaced with:

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

The Office shall select and enter into an agreement with a statewide organization that has population-specific service experience to provide or cause to be provided supportive services and shelter to those households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence. **DELETE LINES 15-20** If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities under this section, the Office shall work with another entity to ensure that there is not a gap in services.

- **Hotel & Motel Room Caps (Sec 4 § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS (b) (4) & (c) (4)) pages 16 and 17**

We understand Sec 4 § 2208. HOTELS AND MOTELS (b) (4) & (c) (4) to have the capped hotel and motel rooms only apply to the respective subsections. To make this clear, we recommend adding the language from H.594 to Sec 10, by adding a new section (d)

(d) Use of hotels and motels are permitted for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and human trafficking where no discrete, safe housing alternatives exist. **Maximum capacities identified in Sec. 4 of this act shall not apply to Section § 602.**



Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with the committee throughout the session.