



481 Summer St., Suite 101, St. Johnsbury, VT 05819 Phone (802) 748-5182

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Chair Wood,

I am writing in my role as Executive Director of the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging to strongly urge the Committee to support continued funding for HomeShare Vermont's expansion, including the \$235,000 appropriation request to serve the Northeast Kingdom, Southern Windsor County, and Windham County.

The Northeast Kingdom is one of the oldest and most rural regions in the state. Essex, Orleans, and Caledonia counties consistently rank among the counties with the highest median age in Vermont, and more than one in four residents in our region is age 60 or older. At the same time, many older adults are living on fixed incomes that have not kept pace with rising property taxes, home maintenance costs, heating expenses, and transportation challenges. Too many of our neighbors are housing cost-burdened, isolated, or quietly struggling to remain in homes they have lived in for decades.

We see this every day in our work.

Older Vermonters in the Kingdom want to age in place. They want to remain in their homes, close to family, neighbors, churches, and the community ties that define rural life. Yet for many, assisted living or supportive housing is financially out of reach. For others, leaving their community would mean losing the very social connections that sustain their health and well-being.

HomeShare Vermont offers a practical, dignified solution. By carefully matching hosts who have extra space with guests seeking affordable housing, and conducting thorough screening, including multiple background and reference checks, the program creates arrangements that are safe, structured, and mutually beneficial. Guests contribute meaningful household support such as snow removal, transportation assistance, and companionship. Hosts gain both practical help and the reassurance of someone present in the home.

In a rural region like ours, where workforce shortages, housing scarcity, and social isolation intersect, this model is especially powerful. It addresses housing affordability while simultaneously strengthening informal support networks that help prevent more costly interventions down the line. From a systems perspective, it is a modest investment with outsized return supporting housing stability, reducing isolation, and helping delay or avoid premature institutional care.

Importantly, this expansion also strengthens trusted local partners, including the Northeast Kingdom Council on Aging, ensuring that implementation is rooted in deep regional relationships and knowledge of community needs.

At a time when federal resources are uncertain and economic pressures are increasing for older adults and people with disabilities, programs like HomeShare Vermont are not simply innovative they are necessary. They provide choice. They preserve dignity. And they keep Vermonters connected to their communities.

I respectfully urge the Committee to continue funding this expansion so that residents of the Northeast Kingdom and the other proposed regions have equitable access to this effective and compassionate housing option.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Darryl Washington", is written over a long horizontal line that extends across the page.

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