



March 11, 2026

Representative Marc Mihaly
Chair, House Committee on General & Housing
Vermont State Legislature
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Representative Mihaly,

I am writing to share a story that illustrates the consequences of how the current legal framework hampers housing provider's ability to maintain safe and decent housing in the face of dangerous and illegal behavior by tenants and their guests.

Great River Terrace (GRT) is an affordable housing community located on Putney Road in Brattleboro. It opened in 2018 to provide housing to individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness and who have a high level of acuity. Each of the 22 micro-apartments has a kitchen and bath and there is a community center on the property that provides shared community and kitchen space for events, office space for an onsite service provider and laundry facilities.

When GRT initially opened, the property experienced several years of stability with residents receiving robust services from our service partner, Groundworks Collaborative. However, during the isolating COVID years, which coincided with the introduction of fentanyl in the drug supply, the community began to experience significant challenges. The largest number of individuals utilizing the covid era motel program in Brattleboro were living at a hotel directly adjacent to the property and the whole neighborhood became a prime destination for organized drug traffickers coming up from Hartford, CT.

Since then, the wellbeing and safety of the residents at GRT have been greatly compromised. There have been several overdose deaths on the property, a shooting death of an individual from Hartford and several assaults. In addition, one particularly vulnerable resident had his unit completely taken over by drug traffickers and he was sleeping outside on the ground in a sleeping bag. Without proper legal tools to trespass unauthorized occupants, we've had to rely on evictions as the main way to address these issues. This approach only further destabilizes an already vulnerable population.

It also destabilized the financial sustainability of the property because evictions are costly on many fronts. Extraordinary legal expenses, higher than normal turn-over costs due to extensive property damage, and vacancy loss have all resulted in significant financial strain for this small-scale community. In addition, the Housing Trust has experienced high staff turn-over in its property management division, in part because staff have reported a sense of frustration that they cannot affect change in the face of clear safety issues for our residents. For all these reasons, we no longer felt that we were able to meet our mission to provide safe and decent housing in this location.

To address this unfortunate situation, we recently worked with our funder partners to confirm that our regulatory requirements supported a transition from a permanent support housing community to a general occupancy community where there is a more balanced level of acuity among the residents. It's important to note that while no current resident will be displaced because of this transition and the rebalancing will happen as natural attrition occurs at the property, it will result in the reduction of a community resource originally intended to address the homelessness crisis in Vermont.

As you can imagine, this was a heart wrenching decision that we did not come to easily. However, the property was no longer financially sustainable and currently, there is no funding available that distributes the financial risk among all the stakeholders. So, when things go sideways, it's the housing provider who is left to bear the brunt of financial consequences.

I'm sharing this story because it helps illustrate why I am so committed to advocating for changes that will give housing providers more effective tools to address really challenging situations because maintaining the status quo has real consequences for renters, for those experiencing homelessness and for the network of housing providers. Housing providers will be forced to take less risk as a way to protect organizational sustainability, staffing levels and reputations, all key ingredients for our ability to continue creating new housing opportunities in the future.

Finally, when we announced this change to the residents at GRT last week, there was a palpable sense of relief among those who attended the meeting. One renter, an original resident who has maintained her sobriety since she moved in, talked passionately about what it has been like to live in this environment. She expressed a sense of hopelessness that we can't do anything to control who is on the property and she described the traumatic impact of witnessing neighbors perish from drug use because we can't get rid of the unauthorized folks setting up shop. Another resident, a man who has found some stability and now works 5 days a week at a local deli, also felt encouraged by this change because he perceives that safety on the property will increase.

I know many people are concerned about tenant rights with some of the proposed changes. I am too. However, it is stories from tenants like those shared above that fuel my advocacy for these changes. I believe that the combination of a faster eviction timeline when illegal and threatening behavior is occurring, combined with a No Trespass provision to address similar

“guest” behavior is the right focus and balance. These two tools will allow us to more quickly address challenging situations in our community and fulfill the promise of safe and decent housing that is our mission.

Thank you for your work on this important issue and for working toward a solution that strikes the right balance. I’m happy to answer any questions you may have.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elizabeth', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Elizabeth Bridgewater
Executive Director

Cc: Rep. Martin LaLone, Chair of House Judiciary Committee
Rep. Robin Scheu, Chair of House Appropriations
Rep. Jill Krowinski, Speaker of the House