Testimony to the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules

Vermont 211 — Implementation of Act 143

Alison Lamagna, Executive Director, United Ways of VT / Vermont 211

Dear Chair Squirrell and Committee Members,

I am writing to urge restoration of access to the Vermont Housing Response Continuum (VHRC) Level 4 hotel vouchers through VT 211. While VT 211 has been engaged in ongoing discussions with DCF, no changes have been made yet to restore VT 211 as an access point for urgent shelter needs outside of business hours.

For more than 20 years, Vermont 211 has been a trusted front door to health and human services, including 15 years partnering with the State to provide after-hours access to emergency housing. We are staffed 8 a.m.–10 p.m., seven days a week, including weekends and holidays.

Restoring our role would not change eligibility, case management, or housing-planning requirements. VT 211 can use our existing expertise and access to state systems to conduct initial eligibility screenings and issue vouchers until the next business day when ESD completes the full assessment with clients. In July and August alone, VT 211 handled 2,271 emergency housing-related calls, completed 1,065 intakes, and issued 212 vouchers. More than half of those vouchers went to people with disabilities, and 60 went to families with children.

People experiencing homelessness face very real barriers in accessing the system; they are often borrowing a phone, lack a reliable callback number, or are unable to remain on the phone for an extended intake process. These crises don't happen exclusively during business hours. Restoring after-hours access through a brief, initial assessment and eligibility screening would maintain program requirements while allowing people to enter the process when they need help.

We recommend that any revised rules explicitly recognize the need for access to VHRC Level 4 emergency shelter seven days a week, including evenings, weekends, and holidays.

Thank you for your consideration.