City of Burlington, Rebecca Reese

My name is Rebecca Reese, and I'm the City of Burlington's Homelessness and Community Health Manager. I oversee our cross-departmental City response to support our unsheltered neighbors. They often experience intersecting challenges like untreated mental health and substance use disorder. The City's response spans street-based outreach, land and infrastructure stewardship, and law enforcement. This requires close collaboration with community partners, shelter and housing providers, healthcare providers, and state partners.

Homelessness crisis goes beyond Burlington

These challenges aren't unique to just one city. During a recent meeting with elected officials from St. Albans, Newport, and Montpelier, each community detailed the same situation, the same challenges. Communities across Vermont are feeling the impacts of the homelessness crisis and the roll out of Act 143 Level 4 changes. In Burlington alone, there are over 300 individuals and families experiencing unsheltered homelessness.

Update on Municipal Support Grant

DCF heard our concerns about the initial interpretation of the Municipal Support Grant and made adjustments to better align implementation with legislative intent. We appreciate the willingness to listen and make changes – and want to acknowledge this progress. This adjusted interpretation has allowed us to reapply for expanded bathroom access and storage, which currently does not exist for those experiencing homelessness.

Continued work with advocates

The City of Burlington listens and responds to community provider feedback on City policies and actions. Those working on the ground are best equipped to provide a realistic landscape and the impacts of those policies and actions. Being responsive to and respectful of the expertise of those direct service providers is paramount to being effective leaders. The willingness of State to continue working with our Vermont-wide advocates and experts in the field will ultimately create better outcomes for our communities and our most vulnerable neighbors.

We stand behind the advocates who have spoken today and the collaborative work that's being done to improve these emergency rules.

Permanent rules do not go into effect until October 1, 2027

We must not lose urgency at this time. The permanent rules are not set to go into effect until October 2027, meaning we could be living with these emergency rules and the barriers they create for another year. Vermonters experiencing homelessness, service providers, and our communities cannot continue absorbing this level of burden, while we wait for permanent rules.

We appreciate the progress that's been made, and we ask that you keep that momentum going.

We request the following:

- Ensure rule changes are documented in writing
- Reengage 211 and utilize their capacity to assist after business hours.
- Actively acknowledge where people are entering the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum so the process is accessible for *everyone.*

These are practical changes that matter to people experiencing homelessness and to the communities trying to support them.

Thank you.