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An act relating to the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

* * * Findings and Legislative Intent * * *

Sec. 1. FINDINGS

The General Assembly finds that:

(1) according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, Vermont had the fourth highest rate of homelessness in 2024 in that 53 of every 10,000 Vermonters are experiencing homelessness, with only Hawaii, New York, and Oregon experiencing higher rates;

(2) in 2023, according to the same Annual Homelessness Assessment Report, 51 of every 10,000 Vermonters were experiencing homelessness;

(3) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, there were approximately 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont, which represents a 300 percent increase over the 1,110 unhoused individuals prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020;

(4) of the 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont identified by the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 166 experienced unsheltered

1 homelessness, which is the highest count of unsheltered homeless individuals
2 in Vermont within the past decade;

3 (5) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, over 35
4 percent of those Vermonters experiencing homelessness were unhoused for
5 more than one year and over 72 percent were unhoused for more than 90 days;

6 (6) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 737 of those
7 Vermonters experiencing homelessness were children and youth under 18
8 years of age and 646 were 55 years of age or older;

9 (7) according to the Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, Black
10 Vermonters are 5.6 times more likely to be unhoused as compared to white
11 Vermonters;

12 (8) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that 36,000
13 primary homes are needed in Vermont between 2025–2029, 3,295 of which are
14 needed to address homelessness; and

15 (9) the 2024 Vermont Housing Needs Assessment notes that “[h]alf of
16 all Vermont renters are cost-burdened, and one-in-four pay more than 50
17 [percent] of their income on housing costs, putting them at high risk of
18 eviction,” which “is heightened by Vermont’s rental vacancy rate of 3
19 [percent], which is well below the 5 [percent] rate of a healthy market.”

1 Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

2 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that unsheltered homelessness
3 be eliminated and that homelessness in Vermont be rare, brief, and
4 nonrecurring.

5 (b) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Vermont Homeless
6 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
7 established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is a step toward ensuring that:

8 (1) homelessness be reduced in Vermont and interim shelter
9 opportunities be available to provide a stable pathway to permanent housing
10 for all Vermonters experiencing homelessness, including safe shelter options
11 for individuals living in unsheltered homelessness;

12 (2) Vermont increase the supply of emergency shelter as well as
13 permanent supportive housing that meets the specific needs of individuals;

14 (3) community components of all shelter types are integrated in a
15 systemic manner;

16 (4) time limits, night-by-night shelter, relocation between interim shelter
17 sites, and other disruptions in housing stability be eliminated to the extent
18 possible;

19 (5) Vermont's emergency housing statutes, rules, policies, procedures,
20 and practices be modeled on Housing First principles; and

21 (6) noncongregate shelter be used to the extent possible.

1 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

2 As used in this chapter:

3 (1) “At-risk of homelessness” means in peril of imminently losing a
4 primary, night-time residence or precariously housed.

5 (2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant
6 to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59.

7 (3) “Community-based shelter” means a shelter that meets the
8 Department’s standards for the operation of shelters.

9 (4) “Department” means the Department for Children and Families.

10 (5) “Extreme weather event” means extreme hot or cold temperatures or
11 weather events, such as hurricanes, flooding, or blizzards, that create
12 hazardous conditions for outdoor habitation by humans.

13 (6) “Homeless” means lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime
14 residence.

15 (7) “Household” means an individual and any dependents for whom the
16 individual is legally responsible and who live and intend to stay in Vermont.

17 “Household” includes individuals who reside together as one economic unit,
18 including those who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

19 (8) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not
20 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation.

1 § 2204. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY

2 ASSISTANCE AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING

3 PROGRAM

4 (a) The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
5 Transition to Housing Program is established in the Department and shall be
6 operated by community action agencies and a statewide organization serving
7 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual
8 violence, to the extent funds exist.

9 (b) Community action agencies shall collaborate with other community
10 partners, including municipalities, the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance,
11 Balance of State Continuum of Care, and local housing coalitions. The
12 Program shall utilize coordinated entry and shall utilize, but not duplicate, the
13 work of the community partners. It shall include the following components:

14 (1) supportive services pursuant to section 2205 of this chapter to assist
15 households experiencing homelessness or those households that are at-risk of
16 homelessness pursuant to section 2205 of this chapter;

17 (2) extreme weather event shelters operated or caused to be operated by
18 a community action agency pursuant section 2206 of this chapter; and

19 (3) emergency shelters operated or caused to be operated by a
20 community action agency pursuant to section 2207 of this chapter.

1 (c) The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
2 Transition to Housing Program shall include supportive services and shelters
3 specific to households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic
4 and sexual violence, which shall be provided or caused to be provided by a
5 statewide organization with population-specific service experience pursuant to
6 section 2208 of this section.

7 § 2205. SUPPORTIVE SERVICES

8 A community action agency, in collaboration with other community
9 partners, shall offer or cause to be offered the following supportive services,
10 which may vary in terms of manner and extent depending on the level of
11 shelter a household utilizes or whether the household is at risk of homelessness
12 or experiencing homelessness:

13 (1) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness;

14 (2) household needs assessments;

15 (3) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

16 (4) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
17 assistance;

18 (5) referrals to other services and supports;

19 (6) peer-supported services;

20 (7) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

21 (8) housing navigation services;

1 (9) advocacy; and

2 (10) progress monitoring and interventions.

3 § 2206. EXTREME WEATHER EVENT SHELTER

4 A community action agency shall operate or cause to be operated shelters in
5 the State that shall be used during extreme weather events to shelter any
6 homeless individual who seeks shelter. The community action agencies, in
7 collaboration with community partners, shall prioritize funding for extreme
8 weather event shelters by utilizing data available under this section and
9 considering geographic access. A shelter offered pursuant to this section
10 during an extreme weather event may include time-limited congregate
11 accommodations and may be provided through agreements to municipalities or
12 other entities.

13 § 2207. EMERGENCY SHELTERS

14 (a) Temporary shelter. At a minimum, a community action agency shall
15 serve or cause to be served in a manner that complies with and builds upon the
16 federally required community planning process, households that are prioritized
17 and in need of the services of a temporary shelter. A community action agency
18 may provide or cause to be provided temporary shelter through community-
19 based shelters, temporary use of hotels or motels, lease agreements for full or
20 partial use of an existing building, need-specific shelter arrangements, or other

1 arrangements or combinations of arrangements that comply with the intent of
2 this chapter.

3 (b) Transitional shelter. A community action agency shall serve or cause to
4 be served households in its region in need of the services of a transitional
5 shelter in a manner that complies with and builds upon the federally required
6 community planning process. A community action agency may provide or
7 cause to be provided transitional shelter through community-based shelter,
8 master grant leases, developing shelter capacity, or other arrangements or
9 combinations of arrangements that comply with the intent of this chapter.

10 § 2208. SUPPORTIVE AND SHELTER SERVICES FOR HOUSEHOLDS

11 IMPACTED BY DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

12 As part of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
13 Transition to Housing Program, the Department shall enter into an agreement
14 with a statewide organization with population-specific experience serving
15 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual
16 violence. The organization shall provide or cause to be provided various
17 shelter and case management services that support households.

18 § 2209. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES

19 (a) The community action agencies shall serve or cause to be served
20 households that are experiencing homelessness or that are at risk of
21 homelessness in the State by providing supportive services, extreme weather

1 event shelter, or emergency shelter pursuant to sections 2204–2207 of this
2 chapter. If a community action agency cannot fulfil its responsibilities under
3 this chapter, the Department shall work with other community action agencies
4 or other appropriate community entities to ensure that there is not a gap in
5 services in a community action agency’s region.

6 (b) A community action agency providing or causing to provide services in
7 accordance with this chapter shall:

8 (1) have existing or planned infrastructure to support households in the
9 region, including an established leadership team, a human resources staff, and
10 the ability to receive grant funding and issue subgrants;

11 (2) have the ability to meet the Department’s reporting requirements,
12 including past history of reporting compliance;

13 (3) have community connections with other providers in the region,
14 including local housing coalitions, housing providers, providers of coordinated
15 entry, and providers of services to individuals who are older Vermonters,
16 individuals who have disabilities, substance use disorder, or a mental health
17 condition; individuals reentering the community after incarceration;
18 individuals transitioning from the care and custody of the Commissioner for
19 Children and Families; and families with children; and

20 (4) provide plain language communications to households receiving
21 services.

1 § 2210. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

2 (a) The Agency of Human Services, working with the Department, shall
3 have statewide responsibility for meeting the intent of this chapter, including
4 statewide planning, system development, and the involvement of all the
5 Agency's departments.

6 (b) For the purpose of providing administrative oversight and monitoring of
7 the Program established in this chapter, the Department shall:

8 (1)(A) adopt guidance regarding when extreme weather event shelters
9 shall be operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions; and

10 (B) maintain a website with the locations of all extreme weather
11 event shelters;

12 (2) include as part of any review of a community action agency required
13 pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59, the community action agency's ability to
14 perform the requirements of this chapter;

15 (3)(A) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
16 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
17 domestic and sexual violence pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter, to
18 develop appropriate resource allocations and methods for adjustment that take
19 into account available data, the presence of community-based providers, and
20 customary resource allocation methods, economic indicators, rate of
21 homelessness, rental vacancy rates, and other variables, as appropriate; and

1 (B) annually, distribute funding to each community action agency
2 and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that
3 have experienced domestic and sexual violence pursuant to section 2208 of this
4 chapter using the allocation formula developed pursuant to subdivision (A) of
5 this subdivision (3), or if the Department and community action agencies
6 agree, disperse a joint allocation for all community action agencies, which the
7 community action agencies shall determine how to distribute amongst
8 themselves;

9 (4) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
10 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
11 domestic and sexual violence pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter to
12 develop appropriate measures and methods for accountability of the
13 community action agencies' and the statewide organization's execution of
14 duties under this chapter, including the provision of any previously agreed
15 upon information to enable the Department to evaluate the services provided
16 through grant funds, the effect on households receiving services, and an
17 accounting of expended grant funds;

18 (5) provide support and technical assistance to the community action
19 agencies, other community partners, and the statewide organization serving
20 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual
21 violence pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter;

1 (6) identify specific administrative resources that could be transitioned
2 to community operations;

3 (7) develop and submit standards for the operation of community-based
4 shelters;

5 (8) adopt rules pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 25, in consultation with the
6 community action agencies and the statewide organization serving households
7 that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual violence
8 pursuant to section 2208 of this chapter, as appropriate, for the implementation
9 of this chapter, including accommodations for individuals with a disability.

10 § 2211. REGIONAL PLANNING; NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

11 (a) As part of the plan required pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 and the
12 federally required planning and needs assessments for the continuums of care,
13 the community action agencies shall develop a regional needs assessment and
14 planning process, in collaboration with community and State partners, for use
15 in each community action agency's region to inform future plans addressing
16 housing and homelessness in each region of the State. The plans shall include:

17 (1) addressing progress in reducing the number of households
18 experiencing homelessness in a region;

19 (2) assessing the rate households placed in permanent housing return to
20 homelessness and the underlying reasons;

1 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
2 homelessness;

3 (4) reporting the rate of household participation with coordinated entry
4 processes and case management services;

5 (5) identifying system gaps and the funding needed to address those
6 gaps, including periodic inflationary adjustments; and

7 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont's Point-in-Time Count,
8 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

9 (b) Each community action agency shall submit plans developed pursuant
10 to this section to the Department in a format prescribed by the Department.

11 The Department shall aggregate the results of these reports and submit the
12 aggregated report to the House Committee on Human Services and to the
13 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare.

14 § 2212. USE OF HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

15 (a) Hotels and motels providing emergency shelter pursuant to this chapter
16 shall comply with Program rules and shall comply with the following:

17 (1) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule (CVR
18 13-140-023); and

19 (2) Department of Public Safety, Vermont Fire and Building Safety
20 Code (CVR 28-070-001).

1 Transition to Housing Program established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22, including
2 advice and recommendations on the implementation plan required pursuant to
3 Sec. 5 of this act.

4 (b) Membership. The Advisory Committee's membership shall reflect the
5 growing diversity among Vermonters, including individuals who are Black,
6 Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well as with regard to socioeconomic
7 status, geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status and
8 shall be composed of:

9 (1) five representatives with lived experience of homelessness,
10 appointed by the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance and the Balance of
11 State Continuum of Care;

12 (2) five representatives, one appointed by each of the community action
13 agencies;

14 (3) one representative, appointed by the Chittenden County Homeless
15 Alliance;

16 (4) one representative, appointed by the Balance of State Continuum of
17 Care;

18 (5) five representatives of local housing coalitions, including at least two
19 of whom are shelter providers, appointed jointly by the Chittenden County
20 Homeless Alliance and the Balance of State Continuum of Care;

1 (6) the Deputy Commissioner of the Department for Children and
2 Families' Economic Services Division or designee; and

3 (7) the Director of the Department for Children and Families' Office of
4 Economic Opportunity or designee.

5 (c) Assistance. The Advisory Committee shall have the administrative,
6 technical, and legal assistance of the Department for Children and Families.

7 (d) Meetings.

8 (1) The Commissioner shall call the first meeting of the Advisory
9 Committee to occur on or before July 15, 2025.

10 (2) The Committee shall select co-chairs from among its members at the
11 first meeting at least one of whom is not a State employee.

12 (3) A majority of the membership shall constitute a quorum.

13 (4) The Advisory Committee may divide into subcommittees to carry
14 out its duties under this section and subcommittees may include individuals not
15 appointed to the Advisory Committee pursuant to subsection (b) of this
16 section, including representatives of individuals who are older Vermonters,
17 individuals who have disabilities, substance use disorder, or a mental health
18 condition; individuals reentering the community after incarceration;
19 individuals transitioning from the care and custody of the Commissioner for
20 Children and Families; and families with children.

1 (e) Compensation and reimbursement. Members of the Advisory
2 Committee shall be entitled to per diem compensation and reimbursement of
3 expenses as permitted under 32 V.S.A. § 1010 for not more than 12 meetings
4 annually. These payments shall be made from monies appropriated to the
5 Department.

6 (f) Sunset. The Advisory Committee shall cease to exist on July 1, 2029.

7 Sec. 5. IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

8 On or before February 1, 2026, the Department for Children and Families,
9 in collaboration with community action agencies and in consultation with the
10 departments of the Agency of Human Services and the Vermont Homeless
11 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
12 Implementation Advisory Committee established pursuant to Sec. 4 of this act,
13 shall submit a plan to the House Committee on Human Services and to the
14 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare for the implementation of the
15 Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
16 Housing Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 that ensures maximum
17 flexibility for the use of resources and streamlines processes for Program
18 participants. Specifically, the implementation plan shall address:

19 (1) funding allocations among the community action agencies and other
20 providers, including for services specific to households that are experiencing or
21 that have experienced domestic or sexual violence;

1 (2) additional State and federal funding and other resources identified
2 for the Program;

3 (3) appropriate measures and methods of accountability in fulfilling the
4 intent of this act for community action agencies, the organization serving
5 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual
6 violence, and community partners;

7 (4) appropriate supportive services specific to the level of shelter a
8 household utilizes, or whether the household is at risk of homelessness, or
9 experiencing unsheltered homelessness;

10 (5) establishing an appeals process that includes a hearing before the
11 Human Services Board and an option for an expedited appeals process;

12 (6) expanded use of 211 within the intake system;

13 (7) whether continuation in emergency shelter should include an
14 expectation regarding household participation in case management services or
15 other expectations such as night limits on the use of hotels and motels, and if
16 so, what elements and in what circumstances participation in case management
17 services or other expectations should be applied;

18 (8) whether the use of emergency shelter should include financial
19 participation, and if so, what that participation should include;

20 (9) how prioritization should occur for emergency temporary shelter and
21 what priority categories should exist within those parameters;

1 (1) the strengthening of community capabilities for planning,
2 coordinating, and managing federal, State, and other sources of assistance
3 related to the problem of poverty;

4 (2) the better organization and utilization of a range of services related
5 to the needs of ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income; and

6 (3) the broadening of the resource base of programs to secure a more
7 active role in assisting ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income from business,
8 labor, and other groups from the private sector.

9 § 3902. OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

10 (a) The Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity is hereby
11 authorized to allocate available financial assistance for community ~~services~~
12 action agencies and programs in accordance with State and federal law and
13 regulation.

14 (b) The Director may provide financial assistance to community ~~services~~
15 action agencies for the planning, conduct, administration, and evaluation of
16 community ~~service~~ action programs to provide a range of services and
17 activities having a measurable and potentially major impact on causes of
18 poverty in the community or in areas of the community where poverty is a
19 particularly acute problem. Components of those services and activities may
20 involve, without limitation of other activities and supporting facilities designed
21 to assist ~~low income~~ participants with low income:

- 1 (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;
- 2 (2) to obtain adequate education;
- 3 (3) to make better use of available income;
- 4 (4) to ~~provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living~~
5 ~~environment~~ have access to safe, secure, permanent housing;
- 6 (5) to obtain prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery services
7 ~~for the prevention of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and for the rehabilitation~~
8 ~~of narcotic addicts and alcoholics~~ individuals with substance use disorder;
- 9 (6) to obtain emergency assistance through loans and grants to meet
10 immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for
11 health services, nutritious food, housing, and unemployment-related assistance;
- 12 (7) to remove obstacles and solve personal and family problems ~~which~~
13 that block achievement of self-sufficiency;
- 14 (8) to achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community;
- 15 (9) to make more frequent and effective use of other programs related to
16 the purposes of this chapter; and
- 17 (10) to coordinate and establish linkages between governmental and
18 other social service programs to ~~assure~~ ensure the effective delivery of such
19 services to ~~low-income~~ persons; with low income and to encourage the use of
20 entities in the private sector of the community in efforts to ameliorate poverty
21 in the community.

1 (c) The Director is authorized to adopt rules pursuant to chapter 25 of this
2 title appropriate to the carrying out of this chapter and the purposes thereof.

3 § 3903. DESIGNATION OF AGENCIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND
4 ACTIVITIES TO AMELIORATE OR ELIMINATE POVERTY

5 The Director shall designate private nonprofit community based
6 organizations ~~who~~ that have demonstrated or ~~who~~ that can demonstrate the
7 ability to provide services and activities as defined in subsection 3902(b) of
8 this title as community ~~services~~ action agencies.

9 § 3904. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCY PLAN

10 Each designated community ~~services~~ action agency shall determine the need
11 for activities and services within the area served by the agency and shall
12 thereafter prepare a community services plan ~~which~~ that describes the method
13 by which the agency will provide those services. The plan shall include a
14 schedule for the anticipated provision of new or additional services and shall
15 specify the resources ~~which~~ that are needed by and available to the agency to
16 implement the plan. The community services plan shall be completed every
17 three years and updated annually. The plan shall include the regional needs
18 assessment required under 33 V.S.A. § 2211.

1 § 3905. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES;

2 ADMINISTRATION

3 (a) Each community ~~services~~ action agency shall administer its programs as
4 set out in the community services plan and as approved by its board of
5 directors.

6 (b) Each board of a nonprofit community-based organization that is
7 designated a community ~~services~~ action agency under section 3903 of this
8 chapter shall have an executive committee of not more than seven members
9 who shall be representative of the composition of the board and the board shall
10 be so constituted that:

11 * * *

12 (2) one-third of the members of the board are persons chosen in
13 accordance with election procedures adequate to ~~assure~~ ensure that they are
14 representative of ~~the poor~~ individuals with low income in the area served; and

15 (3) the remainder of the members of the board are officials or members
16 of business, industry, labor, religious, welfare, education, or other major
17 groups and interests in the community.

18 (c) Each member of ~~the~~ a board selected to represent a specific geographic
19 area within a community shall reside in the area ~~he or she~~ the member
20 represents. ~~No person selected under subdivisions (2) or (3) of subsection (b)~~
21 ~~as a member of a board shall serve on such board for more than five~~

1 ~~consecutive years, or more than a total of 10 years~~ Each board shall adopt term
2 limits to govern its members.

3 * * * Appropriations * * *

4 Sec. 7. APPROPRIATION; TRANSITION PLANNING

5 In fiscal year 2026, \$10,000,000.00 of one-time funding is appropriated
6 from the General Fund as follows:

7 (1) \$6,500,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
8 distribution to the community action agencies and the statewide organization
9 servicing households experiencing or who have experienced domestic and sexual
10 violence;

11 (2) \$500,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
12 contractual and other system transformation assistance; and

13 (3) \$3,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for the
14 continued development of shelter capacity in the State.

15 Sec. 8. FUTURE APPROPRIATIONS; LEGISLATIVE INTENT

16 It is the intent of the General Assembly that in fiscal year 2027 and
17 thereafter, equivalent funds and resources, base and one-time, used in fiscal
18 year 2025 for General Assistance emergency housing and the Housing
19 Opportunity Grant Program be redesignated for the Vermont Homeless
20 Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program
21 pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

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* * * Effective Dates * * *

Sec. 9. EFFECTIVE DATES

This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, except that Sec. 3 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program) shall take effect on July 1, 2026.