

**Jenna O'Farrell, Executive Director, Northeast Kingdom Community Action
President, Vermont Community Action Partnership
FY26 Budget Public Hearing Testimony
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My name is Jenna O'Farrell, I'm the Executive Director of Northeast Kingdom Community Action and the current President of the statewide Vermont Community Action Partnership, or VCAP.

VCAP is requesting \$15.8 million in HOP grant funding in the FY26 budget to support homelessness prevention services across the state.

For over 60 years, Community Action has inspired a spirit of hope and helped individuals and families connect to approaches that help them succeed. Our communities are healthier, safer and happier when we meet the needs of everyone who lives in them.

People facing homelessness are parents, children, siblings, friends, neighbors, and co-workers. Without support, any one of us is a finite number personal crises away from confronting this challenge. When the State of Vermont supports people facing homelessness, we fulfill a promise that help will be there when it's needed.

Homelessness prevention services help people address diverse, emerging challenges so they can secure - and thrive in - stable housing.

Homelessness prevention is cost effective, one of the state's most affordable choices to address this challenge - it reduces the need for shelter and hotel/motel stays, shortens their duration when needed, and reduces reliance on costly emergency services.

VCAP services reach every county and corner of the state. In 2024 alone, we served over 43,000 Vermonters. From Head Start to fuel assistance, shelter operation to housing navigation, food security to financial skill building, disaster assistance to community justice, Vermont's community action agencies address all dimensions of poverty in our state and understand how best to counter its root causes. This deep experience informs and strengthens our homelessness prevention services.

Again, VCAP is requesting \$15.8 million in HOP grant funding in the FY26 budget to support homelessness prevention services across the state.

We also ask that you support the FY26 budget requests of the Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, of which we are members.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.