

Dear Senator Perchlik,

I write you today with urgency on behalf of Vermont Legal Aid – the oldest and largest Statewide provider of free civil legal services. Without further action we will lose most of our capacity to represent tenants, the homeless, and low-income homeowners facing foreclosure. These losses in our housing practice have three causes: the expiration of the statute authorizing our Tenant Representation Pilot Project as of October 31, 2026, along with its \$512,500 annual appropriation; a third year of no inflationary increase in our funding through the Agency of Human Services; and the end of a grant that supported our foreclosure practice. Taken together this will amount to more than 600K in funding cuts – in addition to VLA’s over 500K loss due to the discontinuation of our Medicare Advocacy Program in the Governor’s budget. These cuts will invariably increase homelessness. Our capacity for housing cases has already declined due to cuts we suffered last year. We are feeling the effects. In the first three months of last year the intake helpline – administered by our sister agency Legal Services Vermont - opened 440 housing cases for representation, that number is down by 132 cases for the first quarter of this year. I would be happy to speak with you and the committee about these concerns as would the executive director of our sister agency Legal Services Vermont.

Thank you for your time and your work on behalf of Vermonters. Best,
Bessie