

Jess Hyman

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Good morning. My name is Jess Hyman, and I am the Associate Director of CVOEO’s statewide Housing Advocacy Programs, including our Fair Housing Education Program.

CVOEO is one of Vermont’s five regional community action agencies, working to advance economic, social, environmental, and racial justice and to support people in achieving economic independence. While many of our programs serve Franklin, Grand Isle, Chittenden, and Addison counties, our Housing Advocacy Programs are **statewide**, serving renters, people living in manufactured home communities, and individuals experiencing housing discrimination.

Through our Statewide Education and Support Program, we:

- Respond to more than **3,000 calls and emails each year** through our helplines for tenants and manufactured home residents;
- Provide **rights and responsibilities education** for renters, landlords, municipal officials, and service providers;
- Offer housing stability and eviction prevention support;
- Deliver services and support organizations working with asylum seekers; and
- Administer a temporary housing voucher program for families exiting homelessness.

I am here today to make two critical funding requests, share our concerns about H.772, and explain why early education and intervention matter for renters and landlords alike.

Funding Requests

First, we respectfully urge the Committee to **restore the \$200,000 housing education appropriation removed from H.772** as it moved through the House. This funding is essential to sustaining statewide fair housing education and support for renters and landlords — services that prevent conflict, reduce evictions, and promote housing stability. Our Tenant Skills, Finding Housing, and Sustaining the Rent workshops, which are offered in various formats and languages, together with one-on-one coaching for renters and our Fair Housing rights and responsibilities trainings have immediate and long-term results.

Second, we urge you to support the **\$600,000 Landlord Liaison appropriation included in the House General bill.**

Landlord Liaisons are a proven, preventative strategy that support both landlords and tenants by:

- Building a **strong, trusted network of landlords;**
- Providing education, technical assistance, and problem-solving support;
- Improving/restoring communication and positive relationships between tenants and landlords before issues escalate;
- Helping landlords navigate difficult situations without turning immediately to eviction; and
- Promoting and sustaining housing stability.

When Landlord Liaisons are strategically placed locally, they create bridges between tenants, landlords, and service providers. They reduce misunderstandings, preserve tenancies, and help responsible landlords succeed — particularly small, local landlords who want help doing the right thing but often lack support. This work directly complements fair housing education and is foundational to any effort to reduce evictions and improve community safety.

Concerns with H.772

We also have deep concerns about H.772. While we recognize the real community safety challenges caused by a small number of egregious situations, this bill significantly reduces due process protections for Vermont’s approximately **70,000 renters**. These changes would disproportionately harm people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, and those already subject to discrimination or harassment.

Shortening eviction notice and response timelines makes it harder for tenants to access legal representation, eviction defense, or emergency rental assistance. The bill also makes multiple changes to landlord–tenant law that weaken existing renter protections. While some provisions were intended to strike balance, the cumulative impact creates unnecessary harm.

If the core issue is the length of time eviction cases take to move through the courts, we believe that problem should be addressed by **increasing court capacity or establishing a housing court**, rather than eroding due process for all renters. CVOEO would support a separate approach that allows for expedited resolution in truly dangerous situations — paired with tenant protections, right to counsel, and funding for legal services. Any expedited process for landlords should be matched by **expedited hearings for tenants**, especially in cases involving habitability or landlord non-compliance.

We also have concerns about provisions that would codify landlord fees such as background or credit check charges, despite existing statutory limits on application fees. These are costs of doing business and should not be charged as add-on fees, especially in a severely constrained market, where a renter may have to apply for dozens of apartments in order to find a home. Other provisions, such as including posting notices on the door as “actual notice” and including an undefined “other” reason for expedited eviction, are also problematic.

Current statute has maintained a good balance between landlord and tenant rights and responsibilities over many years and H.772 disrupts that balance.

Why Fair Housing Education and Early Intervention Matter

Education and early intervention are essential to housing stability. Rental relationships are more successful when both landlords and tenants understand their rights and responsibilities; when renters have access to financial and housing education; and when neutral supports like Landlord Liaisons help resolve issues early.

These investments prevent evictions, reduce homelessness, strengthen landlord participation, and save the state money over time. We spend enormous resources responding to housing crises in Vermont. Investing in education and relationship-based supports helps stop those crises before they start.

Regardless of the outcome of H.772, **fair housing education and landlord liaison services are essential**. If significant law changes move forward, these services will be even more critical. A July 1st implementation date would be unworkable without sufficient time and funding to educate renters, landlords, courts, and service providers statewide.

In closing, we respectfully urge the Committee to:

- **Restore the \$200,000 Fair Housing Education and Support funding;**
- **Fund the \$600,000 Landlord Liaison initiative** included in the House General bill;
- Protect due process while addressing serious safety concerns; and
- Invest in solutions that strengthen housing stability, landlord participation, and community trust.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your thoughtful consideration of these issues. CVOEO looks forward to collaborating with you to craft solutions that are fair, effective, and protect Vermont’s most vulnerable residents.