

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Health and Welfare to which was referred House Bill
3 No. 91 entitled “An act relating to the Vermont Homeless Emergency
4 Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program” respectfully
5 reports that it has considered the same and recommends that the Senate
6 propose to the House that the bill be amended by striking out all after the
7 enacting clause and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

8 * * * Findings and Legislative Intent * * *

9 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

10 The General Assembly finds that:

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

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

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

1 (4) of the 3,458 unhoused individuals in Vermont identified by the
2 Vermont 2024 Point-in-Time Count, 166 experienced unsheltered
3 homelessness, which is the highest count of unsheltered homeless individuals
4 in Vermont within the past decade;

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

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

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

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

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

1 (6) noncongregate shelter be used to the extent possible; and

2 (7) Vermont reduce reliance on the use of hotel and motel rooms to
3 shelter participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters
4 throughout the State for this purpose.

5 (c) 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 replaces the provision of emergency
8 housing through the General Assistance Program established in 33 V.S.A.
9 chapter 21 beginning in fiscal year 2027 and the Housing Opportunity Grant
10 Program beginning in fiscal year 2028.

11 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
12 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2025 * * *

13 Sec. 3. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is added to read:

14 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
15 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

16 § 2201. SHORT TITLE

17 The Program established in this chapter may be cited as “VHEARTH” or
18 the “VHEARTH Program.”

19 § 2202. PURPOSE

20 It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

1 (1) replace the provision of emergency housing through the General
2 Assistance Program established in chapter 21 of this title and use funds and
3 resources previously attributed to those programs, and any other identified
4 State and federal monies, to fund the Vermont Homeless Emergency
5 Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program established in this
6 chapter; and

7 (2) reduce reliance on the use of hotel and motel rooms to shelter
8 participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters throughout
9 the State for this purpose.

10 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

11 As used in this chapter:

12 (1) “At-risk of homelessness” means precariously housed without
13 sufficient income, resources, or support to prevent homelessness.

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

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

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

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

1 (6) “Homeless” means:

2 (A) lacking a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence;

3 (B) facing imminent loss of primary nighttime residence;

4 (C) fleeing or attempting to flee domestic violence; or

5 (D) otherwise defined as homeless under federal law.

6 (7) “Household” means an individual and any dependents for whom the

7 individual is legally responsible who are domiciled in Vermont as evidenced

8 by an intent to dwell in Vermont and to return to Vermont if temporarily

9 absent, coupled with an act or acts consistent with that intent. “Household”

10 includes individuals who reside together as one economic unit, including those

11 who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

12 (8) “Unsheltered homelessness” means sleeping in a location not

13 designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation.

14 § 2204. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

15 (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory

16 council whose membership reflects the growing diversity among Vermonters,

17 including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well

18 as with regards to socioeconomic status, geographic location, gender, sexual

19 identity, and disability status. Members of an advisory council shall include

20 organizations providing services in the region, the Department, and

21 representatives of the Agency and each department of the Agency, as needed.

1 A regional advisory council may collaborate with individuals with lived
2 experience of homelessness, community partners, State partners, housing
3 providers, local housing coalitions, statewide homelessness organizations,
4 providers of coordinated entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations,
5 and municipalities in the region served by the community action agency.

6 (b) Each regional advisory council shall provide advice and
7 recommendations to the community action agency in its region regarding the
8 design and implementation of the Program. The work of each regional
9 advisory council shall be informed by regional planning commissions' housing
10 targets.

11 (c) Each regional advisory council shall meet on at least a quarterly basis.

12 (d) The regional advisory councils shall have the legal and technical
13 support of the Department.

14 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
15 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2026 * * *

16 Sec. 4. 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 is amended to read:

17 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE
18 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

19 * * *

20 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

21 As used in this chapter:

* * *

(2) “Community action agency” means an agency designated pursuant to 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 or the entity or entities otherwise authorized by the Department pursuant to section 2205 of this chapter to fulfill the duties of a community action agency under this chapter.

* * *

§ 2204. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

The Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program is established in the Department to provide services to households that are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, to the extent funds exist.

(1) The Department shall select and contract with a statewide organization that has population-specific service experience to provide or cause to be provided supportive services and shelter to those households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence.

(2) All other participating households shall be served by or through a community action agency responsible for a geographically distinct region of the State. Community action agencies participating in the Program shall

1 provide or cause to be provided supportive services, extreme weather event
2 shelter, and emergency shelter.

3 § 2205. **AUTHORIZATION PROCESS; REAUTHORIZATION REVIEW**

4 **(a) The Department shall authorize a community action agency** to serve or
5 cause to be served households that are homeless or at risk of becoming
6 homeless in a geographically distinct region of the State if it meets the criteria
7 in this section. If a community action agency cannot fulfill its responsibilities
8 under this chapter, the Department shall work with other community action
9 agencies or other appropriate community entities to ensure that there is not a
10 gap in services in a community action agency's region.

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

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

16 (2) the ability to meet the Department's reporting requirements,
17 including having a past history of reporting compliance;

18 (3) the capacity to perform the services required pursuant to section
19 2206 of this chapter;

1 (4) any outcome measures established in this chapter;

2 (5) community connections with other providers in the region, including
3 local housing coalitions, housing providers, providers of coordinated entry,
4 continuum of care, faith-based organizations, and providers of services to
5 individuals who are older Vermonters; individuals who have disabilities,
6 substance use disorder, or a mental health condition; individuals reentering the
7 community after incarceration; individuals transitioning from the care and
8 custody of the Commissioner for Children and Families; and families with
9 children; and

10 (6) the ability to provide plain language communications to households
11 receiving services.

12 (c) Not less than every three years, the Department shall conduct a
13 reauthorization review of each community action agency providing or causing
14 to provide services pursuant to this chapter. An organization may be subject to
15 corrective actions by the Department if, within the constraint of appropriated
16 resources, it no longer meets the requirements in subsection (b) of this section
17 or has failed to adequately meet the needs of households in its region that are
18 homeless or at risk of homelessness. Lack of compliance may result in the
19 Department deciding not to reauthorize the community action agency. The
20 Department may review community action agency performance between
21 reauthorization reviews and progress on any required corrective actions.

1 § 2206. VHEARTH CORE SERVICES

2 (a) The Department shall enter into an agreement with a statewide
3 organization with population-specific experience serving households that are
4 experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual violence. The
5 organization shall provide or cause to be provided various shelter and case
6 management services that support households.

7 (b) Each community action agency shall offer or cause to be offered, in
8 collaboration with community partners, each of the following services within
9 its region:

10 (1) supportive services, including:

11 (A) intake assessments and services for diversion from homelessness,
12 which shall include regional intake shelters;

13 (B) household needs assessments;

14 (C) individualized household plans to address identified needs;

15 (D) assistance obtaining and retaining housing, including financial
16 assistance;

17 (E) navigation to other services and supports, including economic
18 benefits;

19 (F) peer-supported services;

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

21 (H) housing navigation services;

1 (I) referral to health care assistance, including treatment for mental
2 health conditions and substance use disorder provided by the designated or
3 specialized service agencies;

4 (J) job training and employment services;

5 (K) services related to disability and independent living;

6 (L) advocacy; and

7 (M) progress monitoring and interventions; and

8 (2) the operation of extreme weather event shelters, which may include
9 time-limited congregate accommodations and may be provided through
10 agreements with municipalities or other entities, utilizing available data and
11 considering geographic access to prioritize funding for this purpose; and

12 (3) the operation of emergency shelters in manner that builds upon the
13 federally required community planning process and prioritizes households in
14 need of the services of an emergency shelter, which may include community-
15 based shelters, temporary use of hotels or motels, lease agreements for full or
16 partial use of an existing building, need-specific shelter arrangements, master
17 grant leases, the development of shelter capacity, or other arrangements or
18 combinations of arrangements that comply with the intent of this chapter.

19 § 2207. USE OF HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

20 (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly to decrease reliance on hotel
21 and motel rooms for emergency housing. Annually, as shelter capacity

1 increases in each region of the State, the use of hotel and motel rooms for
2 emergency housing in that region shall decrease. Annually, as part of the
3 Department's budget presentation, the Department shall set goals for increased
4 housing capacity, including shelter beds, permanent supportive housing, and
5 permanent affordable housing, in addition to proposed corresponding decreases
6 in the use of hotel and motel rooms. The Department shall provide data
7 pertaining to the percentage of increased shelter capacity from the previous
8 fiscal year in each region and how that increase impacts the corresponding
9 hotel and motel room usage for emergency housing in each region pursuant to
10 this subsection for the purpose of informing regional planning and
11 expectations.

12 (b) If hotels and motels are used to provide emergency shelter pursuant to
13 this chapter, the hotel and motel operators shall comply with Program rules and
14 the following rules:

15 (1) Department of Health, Licensed Lodging Establishment Rule (CVR
16 13-140-023); and

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

19 (c) Annually, the Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of
20 its budget presentation for approval by the General Assembly. A community

1 action agency shall not pay or cause to be paid with State monies a per room,
2 per night basis that exceeds the rate approved by the General Assembly.

3 (d) If a hotel or motel is being utilized:

4 (1) a community action agency shall enter into agreements for the use of
5 blocks of hotel and motel rooms and negotiate the conditions of use for those
6 blocks, including access for providers of case management or other supportive
7 services and strategic placements that avoid isolating certain populations; and

8 (2) prioritize the use of hotel and motel room agreements over
9 individual per room, per night hotel or motel room use, unless it is not
10 appropriate to a household's needs.

11 § 2208. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

12 (a) The Department and the Agency of Human Services shall have
13 statewide responsibility for meeting the intent of this chapter, including
14 statewide planning, system development, and the involvement of all the
15 Agency's departments.

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

18 (1)(A) maintain guidance regarding when extreme weather event
19 shelters shall be operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions;
20 and

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

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

6 (3)(A) consult with the community action agencies and the statewide
7 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
8 domestic and sexual violence, to develop appropriate resource allocations and
9 methods for adjustment that take into account available data, the presence of
10 community-based providers, and customary resource allocation methods,
11 economic indicators, rate of homelessness, rental vacancy rates, and other
12 variables, as appropriate; and

13 (B) annually, distribute funding to each community action agency
14 and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that
15 have experienced domestic and sexual violence using the allocation formula
16 developed pursuant to subdivision (A) of this subdivision (b)(3), or if the
17 Department and community action agencies agree, disperse a joint allocation
18 for all community action agencies, which the community action agencies shall
19 determine how to distribute amongst themselves;

20 (4) provide support and technical assistance to the community action
21 agencies, other community partners, and the statewide organization serving

1 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic and sexual
2 violence;

3 (5) identify specific administrative resources that could be transitioned
4 to community operations;

5 (6) develop and maintain standards for the core services listed in section
6 2206 of this chapter, including the operation of community-based shelters; and

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

12 § 2209. REGIONAL PLANNING; NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

13 (a) As part of the plan required every three years pursuant to 3 V.S.A.
14 § 3904 and the federally required planning and needs assessments for the
15 continuums of care, the community action agencies shall develop a regional
16 needs assessment and planning process, in collaboration with community and
17 State partners, for use in each community action agency's region to inform
18 future plans addressing housing and homelessness in each region of the State.
19 The regional needs assessment and planning process plans shall include:

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

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

3 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
4 homelessness and efforts to improve the equitable distribution of these
5 resources in the region;

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

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

10 (6) utilizing data, including Vermont’s Point-in-Time Count,
11 coordinated entry assessment results, and community conversations.

12 (b) Every three years, each community action agency shall submit plans
13 developed pursuant to this section to the Department in a format prescribed by
14 the Department. Upon receipt of the plans, the Department shall consolidate
15 the results of these reports and submit the consolidated report to the House
16 Committee on Human Services and to the Senate Committee on Health and
17 Welfare.

18 **§ 2210. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

19 On or before the last day of every third month, the Department shall submit
20 a report, in consultation with the community action agencies and the statewide
21 organization serving households experiencing domestic or sexual violence, to

1 the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health
2 and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee addressing:

3 (1) the number of households served through the Program, by household
4 size; eligibility category, if applicable; region; service provider; and type of
5 service;

6 (2) changes in shelter capacity since the previous reporting period;

7 (3) the number of diversions made during the previous reporting period;

8 (4) the number of households whose intake assessment indicated a
9 potential need for services from each department within the Agency;

10 (5) the number of beds available for emergency housing in each region
11 of the State, with separate reporting on the number of beds available in nursing
12 homes and residential care homes for individuals whose screening indicates
13 they could meet the clinical criteria for those settings and the number of
14 emergency beds available for individuals whose screening indicates they do
15 not meet the clinical criteria, including low-barrier shelters, beds for youth, and
16 beds for individuals who have experienced domestic or sexual violence;

17 (6) the number of households that have been successfully transitioned to
18 permanent housing since the previous reporting period, the types of housing
19 settings in which they have been placed, and any supportive services they are
20 receiving in conjunction with their housing;

1 (7) the number of households that may be transitioned to permanent
2 housing in the coming months;

3 (8) any State rules and local regulations and ordinances that are
4 impeding the timely development of safe, decent, affordable housing in
5 Vermont communities in order to:

6 (A) identify areas in which flexibility or discretion are available; and

7 (B) advise whether the temporary suspension of relevant State rules
8 and local regulations and ordinances, or the adoption or amendment of State
9 rules, would facilitate faster and less costly revitalization of existing housing
10 and construction of new housing units;

11 (9) an inventory of all subgrants issued by the statewide organization
12 serving households experiencing or who have experienced domestic or sexual
13 violence and by each community action agency; and

14 (10) gaps in services.

15 § ~~2204~~ 2211. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

16 (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory
17 council whose membership reflects the growing diversity among Vermonters,
18 including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color, as well
19 as with regards to socioeconomic status, geographic location, gender, sexual
20 identity, and disability status. Members of an advisory council shall include
21 organizations providing services in the region, the Department, and

1 representatives of the Agency and each department of the Agency, as needed.

2 A regional advisory council may collaborate with individuals with lived

3 experience of homelessness, community partners, State partners, housing

4 providers, local housing coalitions, statewide homelessness organizations,

5 providers of coordinated entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations,

6 and municipalities in the region served by the community action agency.

7 * * *

8 * * * Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to

9 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2027 * * *

10 Sec. 5. 33 V.S.A. § 2202 is amended to read:

11 § 2202. PURPOSE

12 It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

13 (1) replace the provision of emergency housing through the General
14 Assistance Program established in chapter 21 of this title and the Housing
15 Opportunity Grant Program and use funds and resources previously attributed
16 to those programs, and any other identified State and federal monies, to fund
17 the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to
18 Housing Program established in this chapter; and

19 (2) reduce reliance on the use of hotel and motel rooms to shelter
20 participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters throughout
21 the State for this purpose.

* * * Implementation Planning and Initial Regional Assessments * * *

Sec. 6. VHEARTH IMPLEMENTATION PLANNING

(a) On or before October 1, 2025, the Department for Children and Families, in collaboration with the community action agencies, regional advisory councils established pursuant to 33 V.S.A. § 2204, and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence, shall submit the first of two written implementation plans to the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee outlining its initial plans for the implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the first implementation plan shall include:

(1) a process that community action agencies, in coordination with the Department, shall use to conduct regularly occurring regional needs assessments and develop future regional plans, including consideration of municipal needs, such as public safety;

(2) recommended performance measures to evaluate the community action agencies and the statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual violence in carrying out their duties under 33 V.S.A. chapter 22, including:

1 (A) the provision of any previously agreed upon information to
2 enable the Department to evaluate the services provided through grant funds,
3 the effect on households receiving services, and an accounting of expended
4 grant funds; and

5 (B) performance measures that may be specific to an individual
6 region of the State or provider;

7 (3) recommended eligibility for each of the services offered through 33
8 V.S.A. chapter 22;

9 (4) guidance regarding when extreme weather event shelters shall be
10 operated, including flexibility for regional weather conditions;

11 (5) a timeline for the implementation of core services listed in 33 V.S.A.
12 § 2206 for the first six months of fiscal year 2027; and

13 (6) recommended intake and assessment processes to determine
14 appropriate shelter type for households based on Program eligibility.

15 (b) On or before January 15, 2026, the Department for Children and
16 Families, in collaboration with the community action agencies, regional
17 advisory councils established pursuant to 33 V.S.A. § 2204, and the statewide
18 organization serving households that are experiencing or that have experienced
19 domestic or sexual violence, shall submit the second of two written
20 implementation plans to the House Committee on Human Services and the
21 Senate Committee on Health and Welfare outlining its initial plans for the

1 implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
2 Responsive Transition to Housing Program established by 33 V.S.A. chapter
3 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the second implementation plan
4 shall include recommendations on the following:

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

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

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

12 (4) the role of 211 within the intake system;

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

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

20 (7) whether intake and assessment processes should include verification
21 of residency, homelessness, and household income;

1 (8) how to best ensure that there is equitable access to shelter and
2 supportive services for households experiencing homelessness; and
3 (9) any anticipated challenges requiring a legislative solution.

4 Sec. 7. INTERIM AND FINAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT PLANS

5 Prior to the enactment of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and
6 Responsive Transition to Housing Program on July 1, 2026, the statewide
7 organization serving households experiencing or that have experienced
8 domestic or sexual violence and community action agencies shall conduct
9 initial needs assessments in accordance with the process developed in Sec.
10 6(a)(1) of this act. On or before January 15, 2026, the community action
11 agencies shall submit one comprehensive progress report and the statewide
12 organization shall submit a separate report to the House Committees on
13 Appropriations and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on
14 Appropriations and on Health and Welfare, including estimated fiscal year
15 2027 budget requests, estimated costs of administering the Program, and an
16 analysis of any hinderances to generating additional shelter and permanent
17 housing in the region. On or before April 1, 2026, the community action
18 agencies shall submit one comprehensive report detailing the results of each
19 region's needs assessment and implementation plans and the statewide
20 organization shall submit a separate report, which shall not exceed the
21 budgetary estimates provided in the progress report, to the House Committees

1 on Appropriations and on Human Services and the Senate Committees on
2 Appropriations and on Health and Welfare. The initial needs assessment
3 conducted pursuant to this section shall include:

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

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

8 (3) identifying resources developed and utilized in the region to address
9 homelessness and efforts to improve the equitable distribution of these
10 resources in the region;

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

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

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

17 * * * Community Action Agencies * * *

18 Sec. 8. 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 is amended to read:

19 CHAPTER 59. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES

20 § 3901. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

1 (a) Recognizing that the economic well-being and social equity of every
2 Vermonter has long been a fundamental concern of the State, it remains
3 evident that ~~poverty continues to be the lot of~~ a substantial number of
4 Vermont's population continues to experience poverty. It is the policy of ~~this~~
5 the State to help develop the full potential of each of its citizens so they can
6 contribute to the fullest extent possible to the life of our communities and the
7 State as a whole.

8 (b) It is the purpose of this chapter to strengthen, supplement, and
9 coordinate efforts that further this policy through:

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

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

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

18 § 3902. OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

19 (a) The Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity is hereby
20 authorized to allocate available financial assistance for community ~~services~~

1 action agencies and programs in accordance with State and federal law and
2 regulation.

3 (b) The Director may provide financial assistance to community ~~services~~
4 action agencies for the planning, conduct, administration, and evaluation of
5 community ~~service~~ action programs to provide a range of services and
6 activities having a measurable and potentially major impact on causes of
7 poverty in the community or in areas of the community where poverty is a
8 particularly acute problem. Components of those services and activities may
9 involve, without limitation of other activities and supporting facilities designed
10 to assist ~~low-income~~ participants with low income:

11 (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;

12 (2) to obtain adequate education;

13 (3) to make better use of available income;

14 (4) to ~~provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living~~
15 ~~environment~~ have access to safe, secure, permanent housing;

16 (5) to obtain prevention, intervention, treatment, and recovery services
17 ~~for the prevention of narcotics addiction, alcoholism, and for the rehabilitation~~
18 ~~of narcotic addicts and alcoholics~~ individuals with substance use disorder;

19 (6) to obtain emergency assistance through loans and grants to meet
20 immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for
21 health services, nutritious food, housing, and unemployment-related assistance;

1 (7) to remove obstacles and solve personal and family problems ~~which~~
2 that block achievement of self-sufficiency;

3 (8) to achieve greater participation in the affairs of the community;

4 (9) to make more frequent and effective use of other programs related to
5 the purposes of this chapter; and

6 (10) to coordinate and establish linkages between governmental and
7 other social service programs to ~~assure~~ ensure the effective delivery of such
8 services to ~~low-income~~ persons; with low income and to encourage the use of
9 entities in the private sector of the community in efforts to ameliorate poverty
10 in the community.

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

13 § 3903. DESIGNATION OF AGENCIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND
14 ACTIVITIES TO AMELIORATE OR ELIMINATE POVERTY

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

19 § 3904. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCY PLAN

20 Each designated community ~~services~~ action agency shall determine the need
21 for activities and services within the area served by the agency and shall

1 thereafter prepare a community services plan ~~which~~ that describes the method
2 by which the agency will provide those services. The plan shall include a
3 schedule for the anticipated provision of new or additional services and shall
4 specify the resources ~~which~~ that are needed by and available to the agency to
5 implement the plan. The community services plan shall be completed every
6 three years and updated annually. The plan shall include the regional needs
7 assessment required under 33 V.S.A. § 2211.

8 § 3905. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES;

9 ADMINISTRATION

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

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

18 * * *

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

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

4 (c) Each member of ~~the a~~ board selected to represent a specific geographic
5 area within a community shall reside in the area ~~he or she~~ the member
6 represents. ~~No person selected under subdivisions (2) or (3) of subsection (b)~~
7 ~~as a member of a board shall serve on such board for more than five~~
8 ~~consecutive years, or more than a total of 10 years~~ Each board shall adopt term
9 limits to govern its members.

10 * * * Appropriations * * *

11 Sec. 9. APPROPRIATION; TRANSITION PLANNING

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

14 (1) \$5,985,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
15 distribution to the community action agencies and the statewide organization
16 serving households experiencing or who have experienced domestic and sexual
17 violence;

18 (2) \$515,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
19 distribution to Bridges to Health;

20 (3) \$500,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for
21 contractual and other system transformation assistance; and

(4) \$3,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for the continued development of shelter capacity in the State.

Sec. 10. FUTURE APPROPRIATIONS; LEGISLATIVE INTENT

It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

(1) in fiscal year 2027 and thereafter, equivalent funds and resources, base and one-time, used in fiscal year 2025 for General Assistance emergency housing be redesignated for the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22;
and

(2) in fiscal year 2028 and thereafter, equivalent funds and resources, base and one-time, used in fiscal year 2025 for the Housing Opportunity Grant program be redesignated for the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

Sec. 11. TRANSITION; HOUSING OPPORTUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

As part of its fiscal year 2028 budget presentation, the Department for Children and Families shall present a plan for transitioning Housing Opportunity Grant Program funding and duties to the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

* * * Effective Dates * * *

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This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, except that:

(1) Secs. 4 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
 tion to Housing Program), and 8 (community action agencies) shall take
 on July 1, 2026;

(2) Sec. 5 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive
dition to Housing Program) shall take effect on July 1, 2027; and

(Committee vote: _____)

Senator _____

FOR THE COMMITTEE