

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;

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”; and

1           (10) since 2020, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board has  
2           constructed 170 new single-family homeownership units and 269 new shelter  
3           beds.

4           Sec. 2. LEGISLATIVE INTENT

5           (a) It is the intent of the General Assembly that unsheltered homelessness  
6           be eliminated and that homelessness in Vermont be rare, brief, and  
7           nonrecurring.

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

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

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

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

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

1           (5) Vermont’s emergency housing statutes, rules, policies, procedures,  
2           and practices be modeled on Housing First principles where appropriate;

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

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

7           (c) It is the intent of the General Assembly that the Vermont Homeless  
8           Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program  
9           established in 33 V.S.A. chapter 22 replaces the provision of emergency  
10           housing through the General Assistance Program established in 33 V.S.A.  
11           chapter 21 beginning in fiscal year 2027 and the Housing Opportunity Grant  
12           Program beginning in fiscal year 2028.

13           \* \* \* Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to  
14           Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2025 \* \* \*

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

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

18           § 2201. SHORT TITLE

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

21           § 2202. PURPOSE

1       It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

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

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

10          (3) assist in maintaining housing for households at-risk of homelessness  
11       and transition households experiencing homelessness to permanent housing.

12       § 2203. DEFINITIONS

13       As used in this chapter:

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

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

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

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

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

4           (6) “Homeless” means:

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

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

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

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

9           (7) “Household” means an individual and any dependents for whom the  
10           individual is legally responsible who are domiciled in Vermont as evidenced  
11           by an intent to dwell in Vermont and to return to Vermont if temporarily  
12           absent, coupled with an act or acts consistent with that intent. “Household”  
13           includes individuals who reside together as one economic unit, including those  
14           who are married, parties to a civil union, or unmarried.

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

17           § 2204. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

18           (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory  
19           council whose membership reflects, to the extent possible, the growing  
20           diversity among Vermonters, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous,  
21           and Persons of Color, as well as with regards to socioeconomic status,

1 geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status. Members of  
2 an advisory council shall include organizations providing services in the  
3 region, the Department, and representatives of the Agency and each  
4 department of the Agency, as needed. A regional advisory council may  
5 collaborate with individuals with lived experience of homelessness,  
6 community partners, State partners, housing providers, local housing  
7 coalitions, statewide homelessness organizations, providers of coordinated  
8 entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and municipalities in the  
9 region served by the community action agency.

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

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

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

18 \* \* \* Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to

19 Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2026 \* \* \*

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

2 CHAPTER 22. VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE  
3 AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING PROGRAM

4 \* \* \*

5 § 2203. DEFINITIONS

6 As used in this chapter:

7 \* \* \*

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

12 \* \* \*

13 § 2204. ESTABLISHMENT; VERMONT HOMELESS EMERGENCY  
14 ASSISTANCE AND RESPONSIVE TRANSITION TO HOUSING  
15 PROGRAM

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

20 (1) The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a  
21 statewide organization that has population-specific service experience to



1 provide or cause to be provided supportive services and shelter to those  
2 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual  
3 violence.

4 (2) All other participating households shall be served by or through a  
5 community action agency responsible for a geographically distinct region of  
6 the State. Community action agencies participating in the Program shall  
7 provide or cause to be provided supportive services, extreme weather event  
8 shelter, and emergency shelter.

9 § 2205. AUTHORIZATION PROCESS; REAUTHORIZATION REVIEW

10 (a) The Department shall select and enter into an agreement with a  
11 statewide organization to provide or cause to be provided supportive services  
12 and shelter to those households that are experiencing or that have experienced  
13 domestic or sexual violence. The Department shall conduct regular reviews of  
14 the statewide organization to ensure compliance with this chapter. The  
15 statewide organization may be subject to corrective actions by the Department  
16 if, within the constraint of appropriated resources, it no longer meets the  
17 requirements of this chapter or has failed to adequately meet the needs of  
18 households that are experiencing or that have experienced domestic or sexual  
19 violence. If the statewide organization cannot fulfill its responsibilities under  
20 this chapter, the Department shall work with another entity to ensure that there  
21 is not a gap in services.

1       **(b)(1)** The Department shall authorize a community action agency to serve  
2       or cause to be served households that are homeless or at risk of becoming  
3       homeless in a geographically distinct region of the State if it meets the criteria  
4       in this section. If a community action agency cannot fulfill its responsibilities  
5       under this chapter, the Department shall work with other community action  
6       agencies or other appropriate community entities to ensure that there is not a  
7       gap in services in a community action agency's region.

8       **(2)** A community action agency providing or causing to provide services  
9       in accordance with this chapter shall have:

10       **(A)** existing or planned infrastructure to support households in the  
11       region, including an established leadership team, a human resources staff, and  
12       the ability to receive grant funding and issue subgrants;

13       **(B)** the ability to meet the Department's reporting requirements,  
14       including having a past history of reporting compliance;

15       **(C)** the capacity to perform the core services required pursuant to  
16       section 2206 of this chapter;

17       **(D)** the capacity to seek and accept charitable contributions, grants,  
18       and services of volunteers, including money, clothing, and furniture;

19       **(E)** any outcome measures established in this chapter;

20       **(F)** community connections with other providers in the region,  
21       including local housing coalitions, housing providers, providers of coordinated

1 entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and providers of services  
2 to individuals who are older Vermonters; individuals who have disabilities, a  
3 substance use disorder, or a mental health condition; individuals reentering the  
4 community after incarceration; individuals transitioning from the care and  
5 custody of the Commissioner for Children and Families; and families with  
6 children; and

7 (G) the ability to provide plain language communications to  
8 households receiving services.

9 (3) Not less than every three years, the Department shall conduct a  
10 reauthorization review of each community action agency providing or causing  
11 to provide services pursuant to this chapter. An organization may be subject to  
12 corrective actions by the Department if, within the constraint of appropriated  
13 resources, it no longer meets the requirements in subdivision (2) of this  
14 subsection or has failed to adequately meet the needs of households in its  
15 region that are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Lack of compliance may  
16 result in the Department deciding not to reauthorize the community action  
17 agency. The Department may review progress of any previously required  
18 corrective actions and may review community action agency performance  
19 between reauthorization reviews.

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 or 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) housing navigation and retention services;

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

18 (F) landlord-tenant outreach, education, and conflict resolution;

19 (G) navigation to other services and supports as identified in the  
20 household's housing plan, including economic benefits, peer-supported  
21 services, job training and employment services, services related to disability

1 and independent living, and referral to health care assistance such as treatment  
2 for mental health conditions and substance use disorder as provided by the  
3 designated and specialized services agencies and preferred providers,  
4 respectively;

5 (H) advocacy; and

6 (I) progress monitoring and interventions; and

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

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

18 § 2207. USE OF HOTEL AND MOTEL ROOMS

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

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

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

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

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

18 (c) Annually, the Department shall propose hotel and motel rates as part of  
19 its budget presentation for approval by the General Assembly. A community  
20 action agency shall not pay or cause to be paid with State monies a per room,  
21 per night basis that exceeds the rate approved by the General Assembly.

1       (d) If a hotel or motel is being utilized, a community action agency:

2               (1) shall enter into agreements for the use of blocks of hotel and motel  
3       rooms and negotiate the conditions of use for those blocks, including access for  
4       providers of case management or other supportive services;

5               (2) shall prioritize the use of hotel and motel room agreements over  
6       individual per room, per night hotel or motel room use, unless it is not  
7       appropriate to a household's needs; and

8               (3) may use strategic placements to the extent certain populations are  
9       not isolated from the wider community served through the Program.

10       § 2208. VHEARTH; DUTIES OF THE DEPARTMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18           (4) 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 or sexual  
21           violence;



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

3       (6) develop and maintain standards for the core services listed in section  
4 2206 of this chapter, including the operation of community-based shelters; and

5       (7) 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 or sexual violence, as  
8 appropriate, for the implementation of this chapter, including accommodations  
9 for individuals with a disability.

10   § 2209. REGIONAL PLANNING; NEEDS ASSESSMENTS

11       (a) As part of the plan required every three years pursuant to 3 V.S.A.  
12 § 3904 and the federally required planning and needs assessments for the  
13 continuum of care, the community action agencies shall develop a regional  
14 needs assessment and planning process, in collaboration with community and  
15 State partners, for use in each community action agency's region to inform  
16 future plans addressing housing and homelessness in each region of the State.  
17 The regional needs assessment and planning process plans shall include:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16          § 2210. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

17          On or before the last day of every third month, the Department shall submit  
18          a report, in consultation with the community action agencies and the statewide  
19          organization serving households experiencing domestic or sexual violence, to  
20          the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate Committee on Health  
21          and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee addressing:

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

4           (2) the number of household members employed on a part-time and full-  
5           time basis and the number of household members receiving Supplemental  
6           Security Income or Social Security disability insurance;

7           (3) changes in capacity for shelter beds, nursing homes, and residential  
8           care homes since the previous reporting period;

9           (4) the number of diversions made during the previous reporting period;

10          (5) the number of households whose intake assessment indicated a  
11          potential need for services from each department within the Agency;

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

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

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

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

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

5           (9) an inventory of all subgrants issued by the statewide organization  
6           serving households experiencing or who have experienced domestic or sexual  
7           violence and by each community action agency.

8           § 2204 2211. REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCILS

9           (a) Each community action agency shall convene a regional advisory  
10          council whose membership reflects, to the extent possible, the growing  
11          diversity among Vermonters, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous,  
12          and Persons of Color, as well as with regards to socioeconomic status,  
13          geographic location, gender, sexual identity, and disability status. Members of  
14          an advisory council shall include organizations providing services in the  
15          region, the Department, and representatives of the Agency and each  
16          department of the Agency, as needed. A regional advisory council may  
17          collaborate with individuals with lived experience of homelessness,  
18          community partners, State partners, housing providers, local housing  
19          coalitions, statewide homelessness organizations, providers of coordinated  
20          entry, continuums of care, faith-based organizations, and municipalities in the  
21          region served by the community action agency.

\* \* \*

\* \* \* Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to  
Housing Program; Effective July 1, 2027 \* \* \*

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

§ 2202. PURPOSE

It is the purpose of the General Assembly to:

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

(2) reduce reliance on the use of hotel and motel rooms to shelter  
participating households and expand the use of emergency shelters throughout  
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, and the  
statewide organization serving households that are experiencing or that have  
experienced domestic or sexual violence, shall submit the first of two written

1 implementation plans to the House Committee on Human Services, the Senate  
2 Committee on Health and Welfare, and the Joint Fiscal Committee outlining its  
3 initial plans for the implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency  
4 Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program established by 33  
5 V.S.A. chapter 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the first  
6 implementation plan shall include:

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

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

15 (A) the provision of any previously agreed upon information to  
16 enable the Department to evaluate the services provided through grant funds,  
17 the effect on households receiving services, and an accounting of expended  
18 grant funds; and

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

1           (3) recommended eligibility for each of the services offered through 33

2           V.S.A. chapter 22;

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

5           (5) a timeline for the implementation of core services listed in 33 V.S.A.  
6           § 2206 for the first six months of fiscal year 2027;

7           (6) recommended intake and assessment processes to determine  
8           appropriate shelter and services for households based on Program eligibility;  
9           and

10           (7) a recommended process to enable an unwilling community action  
11           agency to opt-out of participation in the Program in a manner that gives the  
12           State adequate notice.

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

1 22 on or before July 1, 2026. Specifically, the second implementation plan  
2 shall include recommendations on the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

20 (8) how to best ensure that there is equitable access to shelter and  
21 supportive services for households experiencing homelessness;



1           (9) the number of housing vouchers that Vermont lost in the past year, if  
2           the data is available; and

3           (10) 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 proposals, estimated costs of administering the Program, and an  
16          analysis of any barriers to generating additional shelter and permanent housing  
17          in the region. On or before April 1, 2026, the statewide organization shall  
18          submit a report and the community action agencies shall submit a separate  
19          comprehensive report detailing the results of each region's needs assessment  
20          and implementation plans, which shall not exceed the budgetary proposals  
21          provided in the January 15, 2026 progress report, to the House Committees on

1 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 **Sec. 8. ACCELERATED IMPLEMENTATION PATHWAY**

18 **On or before November 1, 2025, the Department for Children and Families**  
19 **shall submit for consideration a detailed written plan to accelerate**  
20 **implementation of the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and**  
21 **Responsive Transition to Housing Program and part of the fiscal year 2026**

1 budget adjustment process to the Joint Fiscal Committee, to the House  
2 Committees on Appropriations and on Human Services, and to the Senate  
3 Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare. The plan shall  
4 address the readiness of community providers to implement the Program prior  
5 to July 1, 2026 and fiscal estimates for the remainder of fiscal year 2026.

6 \* \* \* Community Action Agencies \* \* \*

7 Sec. 9. 3 V.S.A. chapter 59 is amended to read:

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

9 § 3901. FINDINGS AND PURPOSE

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

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

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

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

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

6       § 3902. OFFICE OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

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

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

19               (1) to secure and retain meaningful employment;

20               (2) to obtain adequate education;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1       § 3903. DESIGNATION OF AGENCIES TO PROVIDE SERVICES AND  
2                   ACTIVITIES TO AMELIORATE OR ELIMINATE POVERTY

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

7       § 3904. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCY PLAN

8           Each designated community ~~services~~ action agency shall determine the need  
9       for activities and services within the area served by the agency and shall  
10      thereafter prepare a community services plan ~~which~~ that describes the method  
11      by which the agency will provide those services. The plan shall include a  
12      schedule for the anticipated provision of new or additional services and shall  
13      specify the resources ~~which~~ that are needed by and available to the agency to  
14      implement the plan. The community services plan shall be completed every  
15      three years and updated annually. The plan shall include the regional needs  
16      assessment required under 33 V.S.A. § 2209.

17      § 3905. COMMUNITY ~~SERVICES~~ ACTION AGENCIES;

18                   ADMINISTRATION

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

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

6 \* \* \*

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

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

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

19 \* \* \* Appropriations \* \* \*

20 Sec. **10**. APPROPRIATION; TRANSITION PLANNING

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

3            (1) \$4,585,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for  
4        distribution to the community action agencies;

5            (2) \$400,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for  
6        distribution to the statewide organization serving households experiencing or  
7        who have experienced domestic or sexual violence;

8            (3) \$515,000.00 to the Department of Health for distribution to Bridges  
9        to Health for services to individuals who are experiencing homelessness or at  
10       risk of becoming homeless;

11           (4) \$1,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for the  
12       distribution of grants to municipalities planning and implementing services for  
13       households that are at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness, in  
14       collaboration with the community action agency serving a municipality's  
15       region;

16           (5) \$500,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families for  
17       contractual and other system transformation assistance; and

18           (6) \$3,000,000.00 to the Department for Children and Families to  
19       enhance capacity for the creation and expansion of emergency shelters and  
20       permanent supportive housing capacity, a subset of which shall be distributed  
21       to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for infrastructure investments



1 and administered in consultation with the Department to ensure new  
2 investments are paired with appropriate support services.

3 Sec. 11. FUTURE APPROPRIATIONS; LEGISLATIVE INTENT

4 It is the intent of the General Assembly that:

5 (1) in fiscal year 2027 and thereafter, funds and resources previously  
6 appropriated for General Assistance emergency housing be redesignated for  
7 the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to  
8 Housing Program pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22; and

9 (2) in fiscal year 2028 and thereafter, funds and resources previously  
10 appropriated for the Housing Opportunity Grant program be redesignated for  
11 the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to  
12 Housing Program pursuant to 33 V.S.A. chapter 22.

13 Sec. 12. TRANSITION; HOUSING OPPORTUNITY GRANT PROGRAM

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

19 \* \* \* Effective Dates \* \* \*

20 Sec. 13. EFFECTIVE DATES

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

1           (1) Secs. 4 (Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive  
2           Transition to Housing Program) and 9 (community action agencies) shall take  
3           effect on July 1, 2026;

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

6           (3) the Department for Children and Families shall commence the  
7           rulemaking process prior July 1, 2026 in order to have rules in place on that  
8           date.

9

10

11

12

13           (Committee vote: \_\_\_\_\_)

14

\_\_\_\_\_

15

Senator \_\_\_\_\_

16

FOR THE COMMITTEE