

Testimony for the Senate Health & Welfare Committee RE: H.91

April 25, 2025

Alison Calderara, Capstone Community Action

On behalf of Vermont Community Action Partnership

- Jenna O'Farrell, Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA)
- Sarah McMullen, Capstone Community Action
- Paul Dragon, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity -CVOEO
- Tom Donahue, Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council- BROCC Community Action
- Joshua Davis, Southeastern Vermont Community Action (SEVCA)

Thank you for the time to testify today, and also for taking seriously our feedback as the Community Action Agencies that would be tasked with administering the new VHEARTH program as envisioned in H.91.

We want to say at the outset that we have discussed H.91 at length and we do believe we as the Community Action Agencies can do what is envisioned in H.91.

It will of course be critical that we have the time and the funding necessary to stand up the new VHEARTH program, and with that support we will serve as the lead agencies in our communities working alongside our partners to effect community change.

VHEARTH is well within our mission and it is aligned with all of the anti-poverty work that we as the Community Action Agencies do. All five of us are committed to this work, and we are also committed to having support at the level of our statewide partnership - the Vermont Community Action Partnership to help ensure statewide consistency and also so we can support each other.

I have submitted a handout that outlines our current services related to homelessness.

We Need a Phased, Realistic Timeline

We have outlined for your committee in previous testimony a three-year phased implementation model:

- FY26: Regional planning and infrastructure development
- FY27: Community Action Agencies administer the GA Emergency Motel Program while OEO continues to administer HOP & continued planning and infrastructure development
- FY28: Full implementation of VHEARTH, including Housing Opportunity Program (HOP) responsibilities

We believe this timeline aligns with what Commissioner Winters was outlining yesterday.

If fully resourced and thoughtfully implemented, VHEARTH can reshape Vermont's emergency housing response for the better.

Funding Needed

We want to take a moment here to clarify for this committee that VCAP has two separate and distinct funding requests for FY2026 at this time.

Our funding request related to H.91 and the transition to VHEARTH is for \$6.83 million. We brought this number to you in previous testimony after all five of us together built out a budget for the transition years. This would need to be annual funding for the next few years at least. We built this budget together - 5 Community Action Agencies sharing our budgets and discussing what we think the needs would be to do the regional needs assessments and planning that would be necessary for a systems shift with the potential for lasting impact.

Our original funding request - which was developed prior to the Executive Order and prior to the shift in H.91 to this transformational VHEARTH program - is still a real need for all five of our Agencies. That **is for an additional \$6.025 million through the HOP program in FY26,** and [you heard testimony](#) about that request during your budget hearing. This request was not funded in the Senate Appropriations' budget. We would still ask you to consider this request so that we can meet the current need for services at our 5 Community Action Agencies in FY26. We believe this request also aligns with Commissioner Winters' desire to serve more of our guests through HOP services in FY26.