

Brenda Siegel: Senate Health & Welfare 4/25/2025
Residency and Proof Of Homelessness

We have other comments based on the discussion and will put them together over the weekend. But wanted to get this to the committee as soon as possible.

End Homelessness Vermont is concerned about comments made by the Department about requiring “proof of homelessness” or “residency”.

Our organization has completed Phase 2 of a longitudinal study project that shows that people in the hotel program were last housed in Vermont. I am including a quote from the report of this phase that will be published next week. I have also attached the preliminary report about where people were last housed that was released last fall. This data also matches the data that was reported by the Agency Of Human Services exactly. Both AHS and EHVT got 4% in their data that was publicly reported.

Here is a quote from the EHVT report that will come out next week:

“People accessing emergency shelters in Vermont were last housed in Vermont:

The broad majority, 81.3%, reported having lived in Vermont for 5 years or more. 74.2% lived in Vermont for longer than 10 years, with 51.5% reporting being lifelong Vermonters. The Vast majority lost permanent housing due to reasons beyond their control and entered into homelessness following that loss of housing. 96% of all participants were last housed in Vermont and entered into homelessness while in Vermont. Only 8 of the 200 interviewed came to Vermont from other states. No participants reported coming to Vermont for the reason of housing or other benefits.

This was reported on last fall in Brave Little State, by Carly Berlin. In this episode: [Is Vermont's motel program a 'magnet' for out-of-staters experiencing homelessness? | Vermont Public](#) . Agency of Human Services data also showed the same 4% that our research did show.

Another concern is that in border areas such as Bennington, Brattleboro, White River Junction, some Vermont residents use shelters across other borders. It would be a dangerous precedent to limit that access for our residents and to not continue to share resources across borders. That would follow a dangerous and discriminatory trend that is happening at the federal government level.

Proof Of Homelessness:

This was a very damaging process for our clients and others in the past. I can speak to it more at length, but there are many reasons why people can not live with a family member or friend. I want to give 2 examples:

1. Mom is called and says “yes Brenda can live with me”. But what the ESD worker doesn’t know is that mom is homophobic or transphobic and the child can not live with their true identity in their home. They are forced to live where they will be discriminated against and it is not emotionally safe.
2. Dad is emotionally abusive or struggles with significant mental illness and Zoe is not safe in the home. But when the ESD worker calls, dad says “sure, Zoe can live here”. Now Zoe does not have access to emergency housing.

Again, in our data, no one was accessing the program who had somewhere else to go at the time that they accessed the program. In addition to those circumstances, it puts people in the position of hearing again that their family does not want to help them. And it forces them to share with family where they are, even when they may have no contact with family for extremely valid reasons. It also slows the process of sheltering people in very extreme ways. It is a disruptive and inhumane process and does not center in working with a household or individual to find the best and most stable path to permanent housing that will essentially make their period of housing instability brief and non recurrent. It sets up an unstable and disruptive process that has a deep administrative burden.

Happy to discuss this more in testimony.