



**Department for Children and Families
Commissioner's Office**

280 State Drive, HC 1 North
Waterbury, VT 05671-1080
www.dcf.vermont.gov

Agency of Human Services

[phone] 802-241-0927
[fax] 802-241-0950

To: Senate Health and Welfare Committee
From: Chris Winters, Commissioner, DCF
Date: Thursday, April 17, 2025
Re: H.91 (An act relating to the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program) Comments

H.91 as passed the House proposes to change the way in which we address homelessness in Vermont. It is a bold idea. It proposes replacing both the GA Emergency Housing and Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP), effective 7/1/26, to be administered and overseen by DCF, but operated by the five community action agencies, with a set aside for a statewide entity to provide services for survivors of domestic violence.

There is merit to the idea of bringing the decision-making closer to the communities it serves, regionally tailored to the needs in the area, while still being grouped into regions and unified among fewer providers for greater coordination and efficiency. It also presents an opportunity to turn away from the hotel / motel model and repurpose those funds toward things that actually work.

The bill as written is largely about planning in the coming year with a large and unwieldy advisory task force, and a report due in February 2026. The timing will not work, and the bill does little to ensure progress in the coming year in a way that extracts us from the hotel/motel model and moves us toward the successful regional based shelter and housing model envisioned by the bill.

This bill does not contain cost or explicitly reduce hotel use. It doesn't include responsibilities of guests, identify all of the core services to be provided, or allow for prioritization of populations to ensure we can successfully serve the most at risk.

DCF proposes a swifter transition away from the hotel model through narrowing GA eligibility, prioritization of certain populations, creating more robust entry points with increased verification and assessment, requiring client participation in case management, improving case management and facilitation of services, and setting benchmarks to move away from hotels as our primary, and ineffective, means of providing emergency shelter.

For an effective transition away from state-run motels in GA in the coming years, and to ensure we do not simply replicate the current program through local providers, we have to re-think how we are using them now, and hand them over to regional entities in a more manageable state, along with clear expectations about core services, populations served, and desired outcomes.