



May 13, 2025

To the Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Dear Chair Lyons, Vice-Chair Larocque Gulick, and Senators Cummings, Hart, and Douglass,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you last week regarding H.91. I have been following more recent discussions, and I offer this letter as additional testimony.

I continue to have serious concerns about this bill. Its goals are good, and I appreciate the intentions behind it - saving money and making progress in resolving the homelessness crisis. But at this time, it is far from clear how H.91 can accomplish these goals.

Regarding cost, the budget proposed for CAP agency staffing, for the first year alone, with many positions not even coming on until mid-year, is proposed at \$4,502,239.42. Thirty-five new positions at CAPs around the state are proposed, at an average year one cost of \$128,635.41. This is far out of line for starting salaries in this field in Vermont. Further, I wonder about the ability to find thirty-five individuals, in various locations around the state, who have the skills and expertise for the work, and who are in the job market. This, at a time when many similar employers are struggling to find staff.

Currently as administered by the OEO, we have a highly successful, well-operating system for the HOP which has allowed thousands of households to end or avoid homelessness. Why would we toss that out in exchange for a huge, new, costly, and unknown, structure?

There are barriers beyond our control that are preventing Vermont, and states all over the country, from achieving more significant results in ameliorating the housing and homelessness crisis in the US. We all know what we need - more housing, and more services. The VHEARTH will not be able to provide these.

At a time when we are watching the early unfolding of what is certain to be a very significant erosion in federal funding for affordable housing construction, the subsidies that allow low-income households to rent those units, and the many programs and services which help keep very vulnerable people stably housed, we should hold steady to what we know works for as long as we can. To make great changes now, while we are waiting for clarity on the full scope of these cuts, would be unwise. Even the Community Services Block Grant, which provides

essential funding to the CAPs, is slated for severe reduction. There is too much uncertainty for us to be making all of the changes called for in H.91 at this time.

I offer two small but specific changes to the language of H.91. On page 6, line 20, add “including all current HOP grantees.” These providers have significant expertise in providing front-line services, and they must be at the table. On page 7, line 1, replace “may” with “shall.”

Further, I very much hope that, rather than move forward on changes to the administration of the HOP, we can convene a study committee on the matter. I suggest this be convened in the summer of 2027. This will allow some time for the CAPs to operate the GA Emergency Housing Program, so their administrative capacity, can be assessed. In addition, by that time we will have more information on the scope of reductions in federal funding, including for the CSBG to the CAPs, as well as for so many other essential programs. These pieces of information can help us to better plan for our next moves.

As currently written, I believe H.91 will inadvertently create another very costly and unnecessarily complex structure that we cannot afford.

I have long believed that, at both the federal and state levels, efficiencies and cost-savings can be found. But the current path laid out by H.91 runs the risk of throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

Sincerely yours,

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Executive Director