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To: The Vermont Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
From: Jonathan Farrell, Executive Director COTS
Date: May 14, 2025
Subject: Bill H.91

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

I am writing to express my ongoing concerns with H.91. This bill is well-intentioned in its desire to re-imagine the GA Emergency Housing funds by moving them to the Community Action Agencies and I am supportive of this change. **However, this bill also seeks to move the Housing Opportunities Program (HOP) funding to those same agencies, and I am not in favor of this move.**

HOP has provided backbone funding and technical assistance which allowed the following to occur through COTS over the course of the last year:

- 126 households were moved from a homeless situation into permanent housing through housing navigation services.
- 159 individuals stayed in our Waystation Shelter
- 36 families stayed in our Family Shelter program.
- 1,784 unique individuals accessed essential services such as a meal, a shower, laundry, and connection to providers at our Daystation.

I do not believe that our local CAP Agency can ramp up to provide this type of support and consistent funding to our agency AND manage the GA funding. The administrative costs of developing this infrastructure will erode the actual dollar amount that goes to services year after year, decreasing help to those who need it most.

COTS is currently undertaking a major shelter expansion and raising \$2M in private funding to provide a 55% increase in shelter capacity and we have done so in cooperation with the Office of Economic Opportunity, with the understanding that funding will continue and increase to support his effort. Upending HOP and OEO places this critical resource at risk as the CAP agencies become administrators and recipients of future funding, not to mention risking the results of our existing programs mentioned above.

HOP is a functional, established, well-run program that produces measurable results for Vermonters in need. Removing it from H.91 for a year is not sufficient – it is still throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater. I cannot support this bill so long as it contains any reference to including HOP now or later down the road. The Health and Human Services Committee of the House drafted this idea without any input whatsoever from the agencies like COTS that do this work. Please do not be a part of upending a very successful service program that keeps Vermonters out of harm's way, out of motels, and in permanent housing.

Thank you,

Jonathan Farrell