

Testimony on H.91 - Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

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Hello, and thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about H.91.

My name is Kim Anetsberger. I am the Executive Director of **Lamoille Community House**, a homeless shelter serving people experiencing homelessness in the Lamoille Valley. We also run the **Recuperative Care Program**, which provides medical respite beds for individuals with higher health needs. Soon, we'll be expanding our services to include family shelters in Lamoille County. Simply put—**shelter work is our work**.

I also serve as the **co-chair of the Balance of State Continuum of Care (CoC)**. As I speak today, I'll let you know which hat I'm wearing.

Speaking with my CoC Hat On

The Balance of State CoC represents a wide range of partners and providers working together to end homelessness across our region. While I can't speak on behalf of every member, I can speak to the **critical role CoCs play** in maintaining a coordinated, accountable system of care.

I'm glad to see the CoCs and local housing coalitions recognized in this bill. If H.91 moves forward, the CoCs need a **meaningful seat at the table**—and we are ready to work collaboratively to define what that looks like.

Speaking with my Shelter Provider Hat On

This is the hat I've worn the longest—so long it feels like part of me.

As a shelter provider that **receives HOP funding**, I have **serious concerns** about the way H.91 proposes to restructure oversight of that funding. In every version of this bill, one question keeps coming up for me: **Why is OEO and HOP funding part of this bill?**

H.91 seems to conflate the **GA** emergency housing program and **HOP**, which are two very different systems. Yes, we can agree—**GA needs improvement**. If moving GA administration to the CAPS is being considered as a solution, then I would urge you to look to the GA Task Force recommendations for guidance. I am **cautiously open** to that idea—**as long as** it's not rushed, is thoughtfully implemented, and CAPs are supported to take on the work.

But that rationale simply doesn't apply to HOP.

HOP is a vital, high functioning program. In fact, it's one of the few well-functioning systems we have. The **Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO)** has built a strong, statewide program with clear standards, oversight, and accountability. OEO ensures consistency across the state through a system that includes: grantee monitoring, building inspections, technical assistance, advisory groups, file reviews, reporting requirements, resource coordination, and much more. In short, OEO is a core accountability partner for our state's shelter provider network. They have a statewide view of our system and the knowledge and expertise to maximize state investments in our homelessness prevention and response system.

Trying to replicate that structure across **five different CAP agencies** would cost more, increase administrative burden, and create **inconsistency** in how services are delivered. Not all CAPs are equally resourced or structured—some are more robust, and more experienced in homelessness response and prevention than others. That's not a knock against CAPs—it's just a reality that this bill doesn't seem to account for.

If H.91 moves forward **without significant, dedicated long-term funding** for that additional administrative burden, then the cost would fall to existing HOP funds—**meaning less money for shelters** like mine, who are providing an essential necessity for the people we serve.

The other, equally concerning possibility is that **not all of OEO's functions would be replicated**, leading to **less accountability and oversight**, and a **weaker, more fragmented system** of shelter provision.

Another issue with the bill is the **conflict of interest** in appointing CAPs as both HOP fund administrators and recipients. What checks and balances would be in place to ensure that funding decisions are made fairly and transparently?

All of these things keep leading me back to the same question. **Why this, and why now?**

We are already living with enormous uncertainty due to instability at the federal level. Why is Vermont adding to that uncertainty for those of us doing this hard, daily work on the ground?

Many of us live and breathe this work—and we were not meaningfully consulted when this bill was drafted. I understand that sometimes things move along quickly and there may not be enough time to consult everyone. Moving forward, I urge the committee to ensure that our state's shelter providers have a meaningful seat at the table as discussions around this bill continue.

The inclusion of HOP in this bill feels like it came out of left field. And without clear explanations, we're left to speculate: Is there a threat of future cuts if we don't comply? Is this politically motivated? I hope not. But in the absence of **transparency**, we're left with whispers in hallways instead of facts.

I'm asking for transparency. I'm asking that if you see a problem in our system of care, you **talk to us**. We're here. We have ideas. And we care deeply about **doing** this work well and we will help find solutions if we know what problem you're trying to address.

For example: the **GA Emergency Housing Task Force** already developed a set of thoughtful recommendations—which seem to have been overlooked entirely.

Frankly, this is not a good look for the state. It feels like an attempt to **distance the state from its responsibility** to care for its most vulnerable people.

Our homeless population is **your population** too. These are **Vermonters**, and yet they're often treated like a problem to be solved, rather than **people to be supported**.

If the energy behind H.91 were redirected toward **root causes**—like building **more affordable housing** and creating sustainable **funding streams**—we'd be in a much stronger position. But instead, we're once again reshuffling programs without addressing the fundamental issue: **the housing crisis**.

This bill won't solve that. Moving HOP funds to CAPs won't build more units. It won't guarantee better services. All it does is **shift responsibility** from the state to nonprofits, further removing accountability.

And let's be clear: shelters are **already** part of the solution. One of the reasons the motel program struggles is because people are placed in isolation, without oversight or support. Shelters provide connection, safety, staff support, and a path forward. This bill does not address either of these things. It does not add the needed resources for the GA program to be successful, and at the same time risks the stability of the shelter system. Restructuring the high-performing HOP system that provides shelter to those without homes will only cause harm. I simply can't see the benefit, and none of my colleagues running shelters do either.

If GA gets restructured, I encourage you to include the funding necessary to ensure that people utilizing motel vouchers are well supported by recommending a budget increase for OEO so critical case management positions funded by ERAP do not disappear in June.

Thank you for your time, and for your willingness to hear from those of us on the frontlines. I urge you to reconsider the inclusion of HOP in this bill—and to continue to speak with all groups that are doing the work every day that would be impacted by this bill. I do believe that Vermont has the potential to be the kind of state that sees every one of its residents as equal contributors to our society, but we'll only get there if we remember that every new policy we come up with affects real people and has the potential to cause real damage. When we make decisions without consulting the experts in the field, we risk harming the organizations doing the work, and more importantly, the people they are meant to serve. Thank you.