



H.91 – An act relating to the Emergency Temporary Shelter Program
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Thank you to the committee for taking testimony on H. 91, working to eliminate unsheltered homelessness in Vermont and creating a better experience for those accessing temporary and emergency shelter and transitional housing in Vermont.

The Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence is the leading statewide voice on issues of domestic and sexual violence. Our coalition has 15 member organizations that work in every town in Vermont, including supporting survivors fleeing violence with shelter, motel overflow, transitional housing, rapid rehousing, and accessing the General Assistance Emergency Housing program.

Domestic and sexual violence are leading causes of homelessness across the U.S. and here in Vermont. The National Safe Housing Partnership reports that over 57% of women experiencing homelessness report that domestic violence was the primary cause of their homelessness. In 2024, our Member Organizations provided emergency shelter and transitional housing to 1,461 individuals including nearly 500 children. Housing instability and economic security also result from many survivors of domestic and sexual violence remaining in unsafe situations.

As the legislature contemplates changes to Vermont's temporary and emergency shelter system, the proposed framework must consider the needs of survivors, a distinct population with unique needs, systems of care, and federal laws and policies that dictate how these organizations provide shelter and case management. For example, federal law prohibits domestic and sexual violence providers using a shared database or providing identifying information through the coordinated entry system. Homeless survivors also require different wrap around and supportive services.

It is for these reasons that we successfully advocated to include these services in H. 91, building on current practice and funding through DCF. Section 3 of the House-passed bill creates establishes a program within VHEARTH for shelter and supportive services for victims of domestic and sexual violence to be administered by a statewide organization serving victims of domestic and sexual violence, such as the Vermont Network. Through this program, funding will be distributed via a funding formula to our Member Organizations. This funding will provide shelter and supportive services in a manner that meets the unique needs of survivors and comports with federal and state confidentiality requirements and statutes.

While we appreciate the framework established in H. 91, we have two specific items we are requesting be addressed by the Committee:

- **Advisory Committee:** Section 4 of H. 91 creates an Implementation Advisory Committee to provide recommendations regarding the design, implementation, and transition to the VHEARTH program. **We request that a statewide agency serving**



victims of domestic and sexual violence and one domestic or sexual violence shelter provider each be added to the Advisory Committee.

- **Appropriations:** H. 91 proposes to appropriate \$6.5 million to the Department for Children and Families for distribution to the community action agencies and the statewide organization serving domestic and sexual violence survivors. Administering a wholly new program and establishing subrecipient support and monitoring will require significant initial investment. We request that the committee specify the allocation of this \$6.5 million with additional detail. **The Vermont Network anticipates needing \$400,000 in an initial investment to establish the systems to support such a program.**

Thank you for your consideration. We would be happy to answer any questions that you have.