

Memo

To: General Assistance Taskforce

From: Chris Winters, DCF Commissioner

Date: 1/15/2025

Subject: Response to Taskforce Housing Program Recommendations

Act 113¹ created the General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force to provide recommendations to the General Assembly regarding the statewide and local operation and administration of the General Assistance Emergency Housing benefit. The Task Force was directed to examine and provide recommendations on twelve charges ranging from the administrative details of the General Assistance Emergency housing benefit to regulations and ordinances impeding the development of affordable housing in Vermont. It was an ambitious charge, and the Task Force faced the work with passion and a commitment to addressing housing and homelessness in Vermont.

A majority of Task Force members have reached consensus on a range of recommendations. The Department for Children and Families (DCF) and Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) appreciate the spirit of these recommendations and effort that went into addressing the complex challenges and questions posed to the group. The Departments believe that any decision-making regarding these recommendations requires a comprehensive analysis of staffing and fiscal implications which was not considered during the taskforce's discussions, along with other constraints such as the limited motel capacity that exists. The General Assistance Program operates primarily with state funding, which is inherently limited. Expansions or new initiatives would likely result in significant budgetary impacts that must be carefully considered against other human services priorities and even against homelessness prevention and diversion investments to ensure the sustainability of new or already existing programs.

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https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/Docs/ACTS/ACT113/ACT113%20As%20Enacted.pdf?_gl=1*1fyjau*_ga*NDcyMjQ2MjQuMTcwMDA2MDk5Mg..*_ga_V9WQH77KLW*MTczMzg0MTgyMy4yMDIuMC4xNzZODQxOTM5LjAuMC4w



With the enormous task and broad mandate in front of the task force, many recommendations did not come forward until the final meeting. The department did not have sufficient time to conduct the necessary analysis to determine the potential costs and operational effects of each recommendation, some recommendations would also need more details in order to conduct an appropriate analysis. There were several points throughout the meetings when a fiscal analysis was offered by DCF, but that level of detail and analysis was declined by the Task Force. This lack of clarity made it challenging to assess the feasibility of the proposed changes within the context of current resources and program constraints. Without this critical information, the department did not feel comfortable advancing decisions that may overextend the program or compromise its ability to serve Vermonters effectively in the long term. The department would recommend further analysis to evaluate the fiscal and operational impacts of these recommendations to guide informed decision-making and align with the program's capacity and objectives.

As noted in the report, a study of incentives to produce affordable housing is underway in the Affordable Housing Development Regulatory Incentives Study committee established by Act 181 (S.37). Their work has involved the extensive input of stakeholders, including development experts, planners, municipal and legislative leaders, homeowners, renters, and various members of the public. That work, led by the Vermont Department of Housing & Community Development, the Vermont Housing Finance Agency, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and the Land Access Opportunity Board is intended to inform key aspects of affordable housing development. Their final report is not yet complete, but it is anticipated to be comprehensive in nature, addressing detailed recommendations regarding obstacles to affordable housing development. That report is a far better vehicle for an in-depth exploration of regulatory and financial incentives for developing affordable housing than this report. The department would recommend that the General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force defer to that work rather than attempt to create another set of recommendations.

The Department would also like to provide an explanation for each charge and recommendation by submitting an edited version of the draft recommendations report that was shared with the taskforce members on December 28th, 2024.

