

TO: House Human Services and Senate Health & Welfare Committees
FROM: Drew Bulfer, Owner of Deer Run
RE: Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum - Act 143 - implementation
DATE: October 9, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Drew Bulfer. I own and operate the Deer Run Motor Inn in Jeffersonville. I'm also a member of the Lamoille Valley Housing and Homelessness Coalition and a board member at Capstone.

Let me start by saying I absolutely support the goal of Act 143. People should not be living in motels indefinitely. But we also have to recognize the realities of rural Vermont.

I also want to acknowledge that shepherding this population can be challenging. The state employees I know, the call center staff, operators like me, we all work really hard in often untenable situations. Not every solution works perfectly, particularly initially, so we must stay creative, pivot, and keep trying.

Regardless, I'm here because I believe there is a significant gap between the way Vermont's motel voucher program is often described and the reality I see every day.

There are certainly operators who fit some of the negative narratives we've all heard, and there are problems that need to be addressed. But that's not the whole story.

The Deer Run solely serves Vermont's motel voucher program. We are closed to the general public and provide emergency housing on demand. We currently have 24 rooms and 41 beds.

We have made a conscious decision to treat our guests as members of a community rather than simply as someone renting a room.

We help guests navigate the voucher process, connect with services, complete paperwork, and work toward permanent housing. We keep our rooms clean, make repairs, and maintain a safe and structured environment. We're strict, but we're fair and our guests feel safe.

Over the years, we have helped countless Vermonters transition into more permanent housing. There's no data infrastructure in place but guests typically tell me when it happens. It's a huge accomplishment.

In places like Lamoille County, there are fewer housing options, fewer services, less transportation, and less shelter capacity. When a voucher expires, there may simply be nowhere else to go.

That can mean somebody who was safely housed yesterday is suddenly sleeping in a car or back with a violent partner.

This doesn't move us toward permanent housing. Instability makes the problem harder to solve.

I'm also concerned about what the current system is doing to the people we serve.

During the first half of September, I watched guests sit on hold for days while their vouchers remained in limbo. They were terrified they might miss a call that could determine whether they remain housed. They were often in tears. Ultimately, many were unable to secure vouchers. While call times have significantly improved, I still have guests find me because they are afraid I might miss an agent renewal call on their behalf and potentially jeopardize their housing.

During the September transition, I had empty rooms. I still do. Non-winter months the hotel sits mostly empty. That is incredibly difficult to understand.

The Deer Run's annual operating budget is approximately 300,000 to 400,000, or roughly 7300-9,800 per bed per year. We need a certain level of occupancy to keep the property operating, and we are currently not reaching that level.

If this continues, I am concerned that the Deer Run—and other rural participating hotels—will become financially unviable.

If we lose these properties, we lose emergency capacity that is difficult to replace, particularly in rural Vermont.

I believe we should improve this program, not eliminate the resource. Hold operators accountable. Require safe and sanitary rooms. Improve oversight. But also collaborate with operators who are doing this work well.

Make the system easier to navigate. Something as simple as allowing voucher renewals by email instead of requiring hours on the phone would make an enormous difference.

The people staying in these rooms are not statistics. They are our neighbors—parents, children, seniors, people working, people looking for work, and people trying to put their lives back together.

I hope we can approach these changes with both accountability and pragmatism.

Let's move people toward permanent housing. Let's fix what isn't working. But let's also preserve enough emergency capacity so that when a Vermonter has nowhere else to go, there is still somewhere safe for them.

This is a labor of love and I hope I can continue to serve this population. I have many ideas and would love to be part of a collaborative solution. To honor the time, I'll hold off here. Thank you.

Drew Bulfer