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TO: Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules
FROM: Vermont Parent Child Center Network
RE: Vermont Housing Response Continuum Emergency Rules – PLEASE REJECT

We are writing collectively to ask you to REJECT the rules for the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum. These rules are not aligned with the law as it was written. The way that DCF is implementing Level 4 of the new Homelessness Response Continuum is creating chaos and multiple barriers for people experiencing homelessness, and we have seen families with young children pushed outside.

The administration's failure to plan and prepare its own staff has resulted in the removal of households who were already in the state-run shelter program, forcing people to scramble to reapply for the benefits they already qualify for. Simultaneously, the state eliminated after-hours service through its VT211 helpline. Eligible individuals and families were removed from emergency housing because the administration's phone lines were out of service or busy. Getting through often meant hours on hold—only to be disconnected. When people finally managed to reach the state to reapply for benefits, many were wrongfully denied the emergency housing they were entitled to receive because intake staff was inadequately trained or because some procedural hurdles had been overlooked, forcing them back onto the streets.

We are especially concerned about any policy that keep young children unhoused or allows pregnant people to be forced to live outside. This new policy that is creating this situation does not seem to align with the legislature's intent with Act 143.

Below are some specific examples of what we are seeing.

PARENT CHILD CENTER OF NORTHWESTERN COUNSELING & SUPPORT SERVICES

The family is a homeless teen and her partner with a 1-year-old. Their second baby is expected. They worked with their Adolescent Services Case manager to get an extension for the hotel program now known as Level 4) as their allotted days were ending. *The extension was not granted and now the family is mostly living out of their car besides some random nights with friends.*

ADDISON COUNTY PARENT CHILD CENTER

An ACPCC Staff Person's Experience when trying to support a young woman who recently became homeless.

I work with a young 22yr old woman (who I will call "A") who was evicted from her apartment on August 28th 2026.

- The Coordinated Entry paperwork was filled and submitted on August 12, 2026.
- On August 28th, we called 211 and then the 1-800-775-0506 to apply for the hotel voucher program. We also called the two shelters in the area to get on their lists.
- On August 28th, we received a call back from the hotel program around 11 am. A was assessed, placed into hotel for 3 nights, and scheduled a phone meeting with the Economics Services case manager to develop a case plan on Monday August 31st at 8:30 AM.
- Monday August 31st: Case Plan meeting took place and a case plan was created. I was not present at that phone call, so I do not know why A's hotel voucher was not extended, but she was not granted a hotel for that night.



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- Tuesday September 1st. A and I called the same 1-800-775-0506 number to gather why she was not granted a hotel voucher. We were on hold for the entire day. Nobody from the hotel program answered our call and A was forced to be on the streets that night.
- Wednesday September 2nd- Friday September 4th. Each of those days, we called the 1-800 number, and we were placed on hold. When a person took us off of hold, we explained why we were calling, they took down the SS number of A to look up her case, then they put us back on hold and we did not hear from them again the entire day. On one of those days, the call dropped and we had to start the process over, but to never get a call back or taken off of hold.
- We were finally able to get to a conversation with a person on Friday September 4th at 4pm. In that conversation, she explained that the whole process had changed since September 1st.
- Stating that all the information, assessment and the case plan that was created on August 28th and 31st was not valid and the process needed to start over. She then explained that the assessment process was different and that A fell under the category of "not a high priority" and therefore needed to make another appointment with a case manager to develop another case plan, get a further assessment to see if she qualifies for the hotel voucher. She then made the appointment for the following Tuesday (Monday was a holiday) September 8th.
- On September 8th she was able to develop a second case plan and retain a voucher to a hotel for an extended period.
- So essentially, we were on hold for 4 days to be told that we needed to make an appointment, and during this time of being on hold, this person was forced to be on the streets for 7 days....What is frustrating is that She completed the assessment and developed a case plan, but it was deemed null and void because but they occurred before the Sept 1st changeover.
- As a provider, this was an extremely frustrating inexcusable experience that created unnecessary stress and anxiety for the person that I was working with. It was hard to see her struggle with living on the street only because the system designed to help her was not able to function properly.

FAMILY CENTER OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

Subject: A Survivor's Plea for Action: What Happened After I Fled Domestic Violence

Dear Vermont Legislators,

I am writing this because I am exhausted.

Not just physically exhausted. I am exhausted from constantly having to fight for basic stability while trying to rebuild a life after domestic violence.

I am a mother. I have a young daughter. And I made the decision to leave Florida because I believed that getting away from an unsafe situation and coming to Vermont would give my daughter and me a chance to start over.

I did not leave because it was easy.

I left because I believed I had to.

I left behind everything familiar. I left my home, my support system, my state, and the life I knew. I came to Vermont trying to protect my child and build something better for both of us.

I came here believing that if I did the right things — asked for help, followed the rules, participated in programs, found housing, went back to school, and worked toward becoming self-sufficient — there would be a path forward.

What I learned is that surviving domestic violence does not end when you physically get away from the person who harmed you.

Sometimes, that is when an entirely different fight begins.

When I arrived in Vermont, I needed housing. I needed stability. I needed help getting my life back together.



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Instead, I found myself navigating shelter systems, housing lists, benefits, social-service programs, paperwork, eligibility requirements, phone calls, waiting lists, and agencies that often have far more people needing help than they have resources to serve.

I stayed at the Waterbury Armory family shelter.

That is not how anyone imagines starting over.

But I did what I had to do.

Eventually, I was placed into a temporary scatter-site apartment in Barre. It was not permanent housing, but it was supposed to be a steppingstone toward stability.

I kept trying.

I applied for housing.

I got on lists.

I tried to work with housing authorities.

I tried to find programs that would accept me.

I tried to navigate the barriers created by having little or no rental history and poor credit.

I was denied housing because of credit.

I encountered housing programs where my previous housing circumstances were used against me.

And while all of this was happening, I was trying to care for my daughter and keep moving forward.

Then I became extremely sick.

I was hospitalized with pneumonia and respiratory failure. I had been sick for weeks.

During that period, I was also dealing with the consequences of being unable to maintain the temporary apartment to the standards expected of me. I was eventually removed from the scatter-site program.

I want lawmakers to understand something very important:

- A person can be trying.
- A person can genuinely want to succeed.
- And a person can still become completely overwhelmed when they are sick, housing-insecure, parenting alone, dealing with trauma, navigating social services, and trying to rebuild their life simultaneously.

People talk about homelessness and instability as though it is simply a matter of someone not trying hard enough. That is not my experience. I have been trying so hard that sometimes I feel like I am running on fumes. And despite everything, I kept going. I went back to school.

I am working toward finishing the remaining credits I need for my high school diploma because I want something different for my future. I want to be able to work. I want to be independent. I want my daughter to see her mother build something instead of giving up. But even that has become a struggle because the systems that are supposed to help people stabilize can require hours of phone calls, waiting on hold, repeated eligibility reviews, and navigating multiple steps just to access assistance.

Recently, I was dealing with the new Act 143 process and trying to get placed. I spent hours on the phone trying to get through the process. At one point, I remained on hold until approximately 5:30 PM and was ultimately disconnected. That means I was missing school while sitting there trying to access the very services that are supposed to help me become stable and self-sufficient. That should not be normal. I should not have to choose between attending school and spending hours trying to access assistance. I should not have to prove over and over again that I need help while simultaneously being expected to become independent.

Mental-health services are another example. There are waiting lists for mental-health services while people are struggling right now. A person should not have to reach a crisis point before they can receive meaningful support.



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We need more accessible mental-health services, more providers, shorter waiting lists, and more funding for the organizations already doing this work. Programs such as Capstone Community Action, Washington County Mental Health, and the Family Center of Washington County are doing work that communities desperately need. These organizations and programs deserve meaningful investment and expansion.

There is another side of this crisis that lawmakers need to hear about: the people working inside these systems are struggling too. Employees at organizations such as Capstone Community Action, Washington County Mental Health, and the Family Center of Washington County are doing incredibly important work for our communities, but many of these workers are underpaid, overworked, and understaffed. This is not because the workers do not care. Quite the opposite. The problem is that there simply are not enough people to do the work, and organizations often do not have the funding necessary to hire and retain enough staff. That creates a vicious cycle. There are more families who need help than there are workers available to help them. The workers who are there become overwhelmed. Caseloads increase. Wait times increase. Employees burn out. People leave. Then there are even fewer workers available to serve the community. And the cycle starts all over again.

We cannot keep expecting nonprofit and community service employees to perform miracles with inadequate funding. If we want people experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, mental-health struggles, and family crises to receive meaningful support, then we have to invest in the people providing that support. Fund the positions. Pay the workers appropriately. Hire enough staff. Give them manageable caseloads. Give organizations the resources they need to retain experienced employees. It is unfair to the workers, and ultimately it hurts the families who desperately need their services. When a caseworker, advocate, counselor, teacher, or family-support worker has an impossible workload, the person waiting for help feels the consequences. I do not blame the frontline workers for a lack of resources. I blame a system that continually asks them to do more with less. If Vermont wants better outcomes for families, we have to fund the infrastructure that makes those outcomes possible.

Brook Street School also deserves significantly more funding and support. Programs specifically designed to help mothers complete their high-school education are exactly the kind of programs we should be expanding, not leaving under-resourced. A mother trying to finish high school is not simply trying to earn a diploma. She is trying to change the trajectory of her family's future. For mothers who have experienced homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, unstable housing, or other barriers, completing an education can be one of the most important steps toward becoming financially independent. I know this because I am doing it myself. I am going back to school because I want to finish what I started and create better opportunities for myself and my daughter. Programs like Brook Street School give mothers the opportunity to pursue that goal while understanding the realities of being a parent. We need more programs like this, more seats, more staff, and more funding. If we genuinely want to reduce poverty and dependence on public assistance, we should be investing in programs that help parents obtain an education and become self-sufficient. You cannot tell people to "get an education and get a better job" while failing to adequately fund the programs that help parents actually accomplish that. Investing in a mother's education is an investment in her children, her family's future, and the community as a whole.

Brook Street School and programs like it should not have to constantly operate around limited resources and staffing constraints while mothers are waiting for the opportunity to change their lives. If we want different outcomes, we have to fund the pathways that create those outcomes. I have also watched the way our society responds to people in crisis and wondered how we got to a point where there can be enormous amounts of money available for some government priorities while people who are already living here cannot get basic services quickly enough.



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I understand that government has competing responsibilities. But I believe we need to seriously examine our priorities. I believe more resources should go toward helping people who are already struggling in our communities. I believe survivors of domestic violence should have access to safe housing without having to spend months fighting through impossible barriers. I believe mental-health services should be available before someone reaches a breaking point. I believe children should have access to strong early-childhood and educational programs regardless of their family's circumstances. I believe community organizations that are preventing homelessness, supporting families, helping people return to school, and assisting people with employment should receive significantly more support.

And I believe people should not have to become perfect victims in order to deserve help. I am not writing this letter because I think government can magically fix my life. I am asking lawmakers to fix the systems that are making it unnecessarily difficult for people like me to rebuild their lives.

When someone escapes domestic violence, the question should not be: "Why can't you just get a job?"

The questions should be:

- "Do you have safe housing?"
- "Do you have transportation?"
- "Do you have childcare?"
- "Do you have access to mental-health care?"
- "Are you able to finish your education?"
- "Can you access benefits without spending your entire day fighting a phone system?"
- "Do you have somewhere safe to go?"
- "Do you have someone helping you navigate the system?"

Because without those foundations, telling someone to simply become self-sufficient is like telling someone to climb a ladder while removing the bottom half of the ladder. I am doing everything I can. I am going back to school. I am trying to secure permanent housing. I am trying to access the programs available to me. I am raising my daughter. I am trying to rebuild my confidence and independence after domestic violence. I am trying to create a future where my daughter does not have to experience the instability that we have experienced. I do not want to spend the rest of my life dependent on government assistance. I want to work. I want an education. I want stable housing. I want to contribute to my community. But I need the opportunity to get there. And that is what I am asking you to fight for.

- Please invest in affordable housing.
- Please increase funding for domestic-violence survivors and emergency housing.
- Please expand mental health services and reduce waiting lists.
- Please adequately fund community-action agencies and family-support organizations.
- Please make benefit and placement systems easier to navigate.
- Please create real pathways from homelessness and emergency assistance into permanent housing and employment.
- Please recognize that surviving domestic violence can create years of financial, emotional, housing, and educational consequences.
- And please stop designing assistance systems around the assumption that everyone seeking help has unlimited time, transportation, energy, internet access, health, childcare, and knowledge of how government bureaucracy works.

I am not asking you to feel sorry for me. I am asking you to listen. I am asking you to understand what happens after a survivor leaves. The story does not end when she gets out. Sometimes that is when the story becomes the



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hardest. I am still here. I am still fighting. I am still going to school. I am still raising my daughter. I am still trying to find permanent housing. I am still trying to build a future. But I should not have to fight this hard simply to reach the starting line.

I hope you will use your position to make Vermont a place where someone fleeing domestic violence can actually rebuild a life — not merely survive from one temporary solution to the next. I hope you will remember that behind every statistic about homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, mental health, education, or public assistance is an actual human being. For me, that person is a mother trying desperately to give her daughter a better life. Please do something with my story. Don't just read it and move on. Use it to ask harder questions about how these systems are funded, how they are administered, and whether they are actually working for the people they are supposed to serve. Because I am not asking for a handout. I am asking for a hand up.

And I am asking you to make sure the next survivor who walks through Vermont's doors has a real path forward.
Sincerely,
Michayla