Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak, City of Burlington
Act 143 Legislative Testimony

October 9, 2026

-- Good afternoon. I am Mayor Emma Mulvaney-Stanak of Burlington and a former member of the Vermont House of Representatives.

-- I am here to speak to the impacts of Act 143 we are seeing on unsheltered homelessness in Burlington and in Chittenden County. Specifically, we have grave concerns that the hotel/motel program is being reduced faster than alternatives are being created, and new eligibility criteria and requirements are making it harder for people to access emergency housing options.

-- This is having a disproportionate impact on Burlington given that our area has the highest rates of unsheltered homelessness in the state. And our data show that many of the unsheltered folks in our area hail from cities and towns across Vermont – and very few from out of state.

-- This is not a Burlington-specific problem. We're seeing this everywhere.

-- As unsheltered homelessness has grown dramatically in recent years, municipalities across Vermont are experiencing firsthand the operational, fiscal, and social consequences.

-- Cities and towns have become the providers of last resort. We are now doing a number of things that we never did before, including the following:

-- We are operating low-barrier emergency cold weather shelters.

The City of Burlington, in partnership with CVOEO, operates one out of our Miller Recreational Center, hosting upwards of 90 guests on many nights it is activated, with demand often exceeding the supply of beds we can provide in that space. This is the largest emergency cold weather shelter operated in the state.

-- We are funding daytime resource centers and community service partners.

The City of Burlington supports CVOEO's Community Resource Center, which is one of three daytime shelters in the county available in the winter months, and we also substantially support the Howard Center's Street Outreach Team. In Burlington, we tripled our local investment for

the Street Outreach Team for both of the last two years because it is critically important to the well-being of our downtown and a critical part of our community safety response system.

-- We are managing encampments and their public health and ecological impacts.

The City of Burlington has a cross-departmental working group that meets weekly to review and respond to encampments on City-owned land, requiring many hours of staff time each week to deal with logistics, service connections, legal requirements, environmental damage, and clean ups.

-- We are responding to increased 911 calls related to medical crises, mental health emergencies, overdoses, and public safety concerns.

--Our Burlington Fire Department responded to over eleven-thousand incidents in 2025 – the busiest year in its 130-year history – with the majority involving emergency medical calls.

-- We are implementing programs to intervene in crises and connect people to long-term solutions.

--Burlington City Staff operate our Situation Table, which convenes over 30 organizations and agencies weekly to proactively identify individuals at acutely elevated risk and coordinate rapid, targeted interventions before crises escalate. Homelessness is often a factor in these cases.

-- These new municipal functions are pushing local governments to the breaking point as we absorb the costs and strain of overtime, public works deployments, emergency management coordination, first responder and provider burnout, overstretched municipal staff, and burdened local property taxpayers.

-- These municipal impacts make an already urgent crisis more difficult and more expensive to manage.

-- In calendar year 2024, Burlington spent over $6M on homelessness response, and in fiscal year 2026, we spent nearly $8.5M.

-- These costs continue to grow each year, and this level of local spending is not sustainable.

-- In the State's FY27 budget, the legislature allocated $500,000 to support municipalities who are disproportionately impacted by homelessness. However, the Administration has implemented the rules for this funding in narrow ways making funding only available for adverse weather days. Cities like Burlington have critical needs for these funds for the entirety of the year. I believe the Administration did not follow legislative intent with its narrow funding criteria. Burlington is left to shoulder a significant continued cost to our City using only local funds. As a City we have faced budget gaps for the last three years in the $8 to $10 million range due to changes in federal funding and other factors. With the increased demands and costs of needing to fund our response to homelessness with local dollars, we have less to use to balance our budget and fund other critical city services for residents and visitors. This is not sustainable.

-- This situation is why I have consistently called for stronger partnership from the State and from municipalities across Vermont.

-- These calls grow more urgent as the reduction in rooms available through the State's hotel/motel program continue to have a disproportionate impact in Burlington.

-- Historically, many of our unsheltered neighbors had to be placed in rooms outside of Chittenden County because the need exceeded our local capacity. Now, there are only 77 rooms being used in Chittenden County – down from 240 rooms a few months ago – and this reflects the difficulty people are having in accessing this resource given changing eligibility and intake requirements enacted through Act 143.

-- Our local data show that we currently have over 300 individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. So outside of these 77 beds, where are they? They don't disappear.

-- **They show up at our local nighttime shelters** – the few we have relative to demand.

-- **They show up at our local dayshelters and service providers** – which are already operating well past capacity.

-- **They show up in our public parks, streets, and waterfront areas** – where they forgo privacy, dignity, and safety, and where they clash with other residents.

-- **They show up in the alleyways and alcoves of local businesses** – many of whom are already grappling with a difficult economic environment from the pandemic and tourism decline.

-- **They show up in our local emergency room** – which is not intended to be a shelter nor a social service provider.

-- **And, as we tragically saw last winter in one of Burlington's parks, they show up deceased** – losing their life to the cold and elements.

-- This *cannot* be our status quo. It is a moral failing and an abandonment of our most vulnerable Vermonters.

-- Winter is coming, and if we don't act urgently, people *will* die.

-- One last data point. 72 – it is the number of people who have the most frequent contact with our Police Department. Contact with our Police Department includes contact with our non-sworn officer division which are outreach workers who check on people's well-being, connect people to services, and handle victim services. Anecdotally, according to our city staff, all but 4 of these 72 people are homeless. And half of the 72 individuals are from other Vermont towns other than Burlington. And only a couple are individuals who are from out of state.

-- I want to tell our residents that the State has been a good faith partner in addressing the historic challenges facing our community – not that State has turned its back on Burlington.

-- Let's move forward together.