

September 3, 2026

Jenney Samuelson, Secretary
Vermont Agency of Human Services
280 State Drive
Waterbury, VT 05671

Dear Secretary Samuelson,

We write as community partner organizations and individuals from across Vermont to urge the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to **immediately reverse the recent change that limits access to the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum (VHRC) to DCF business hours only.** Under this policy, Vermont 211 has been notified that it will no longer be authorized to support intake for the new VHRC or provide other critical support for the program after 4:30 p.m. on weekdays, and on weekends and holidays, leaving Vermonters with limited access to a critical basic need.

It is unrealistic to expect that all Vermonters experiencing a housing crisis, who meet Level 4 criteria, will be able to access phones to contact the housing line during business hours. We know that many individuals need the option to make the call for eligibility screening or assessment outside of normal business hours. VT 211 has been filling this role for decades, and has experienced, knowledgeable staff available to help.

This change went into effect on September 1, and was communicated to VT 211 on August 21, only 24 hours before it was announced to the public, with no advance consultation — despite attempts made by VT 211 earlier this summer to offer continued partnership as this program transitions. DCF was briefed in June on new capabilities in VT 211's call-handling software, and VT 211 specifically requested advance notice and consultation on any changes to their role in EH intake and in regard to the new VHRC. Unfortunately, that did not occur in this case.

The Scale of Need

VT 211 has confirmed that in July alone, they handled 1,024 calls related to Emergency Housing and completed 541 intakes in the AHS GAAPS system outside of the ESD call centers business hours. Under the new policy, in addition to no coverage on weekday evenings, there will be no assistance available for clients from Friday afternoon until Monday morning. Callers to 211 during evenings and weekends routinely report that they:

- Waited all day for a callback from ESD's daytime call center (operated by RDI) that never came
- Were told by ESD staff, during business hours, to call back after 4:30 p.m. to reach VT 211
- Called VT 211 specifically because it is the number the public has consistently been told to call, and because it is easy to remember

The calls VT 211 fields after hours are not simply administrative — they are urgent, and often involve people with nowhere else to turn including:

- Requests for assistance from people who became homeless overnight or over a weekend, or because they were released from incarceration, hospitalization, or another institutional setting with nowhere to go
- Survivors of domestic violence seeking emergency placement
- Motel placements that fall through — rooms refused to pets or service animals, unsafe or unsanitary conditions, disputes with motel management, or safety issues with other guests
- Requests for extensions, renewals, and basic eligibility information

Unanswered Operational Questions

AHS and DCF have not explained how the call volume that has been managed during evening hours and on weekends will be absorbed during the business day. ESD/RDI call center wait times can be excessive in some cases.

While AHS has referred to this as a “pilot program”, it has not specified how it will measure whether this change is “working,” or what threshold of harm would trigger a reversal. DCF has said informally that if the new approach does not work, they may ask VT 211 to resume the after-hours role — but has offered no assurance that VT 211 would have adequate time to prepare staff, and no plan for the confusion this back-and-forth will cause among Vermonters and service providers trying to determine where to send someone in crisis, particularly heading into the winter months.

Our Request

We ask that AHS and DCF:

- Immediately reverse the reduction in after-hours assistance for VHRC and restore full evening, and weekend assistance through VT 211
- Commit to genuine advance consultation with VT 211 and community housing partners — consistent with the partnership already offered — before making any further changes to intake, eligibility, or coverage
- Provide a clear, public plan for how ESD/RDI will manage call volume during business hours before any future reduction in after-hours coverage is considered, including specific metrics AHS will use to evaluate impact

This policy change has created real harm to Vermonters already in precarious situations. We urge you to reverse this policy without delay and to work with us, as partners, on any future changes.

Sincerely,

- Addison County Parent Child Center
- Another Way
- Bennington County Coalition for the Homeless
- Building Bright Futures
- Cathedral Square
- Central VT Home Health and Hospice, Inc.
- Champlain Housing Trust

- Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity
- City of Burlington
- Community Investment, UVM Health
- Connecticut Valley Addiction Recovery
- Connecting Cultures/New England Survivors of Torture and Trauma
- Downstreet Housing & Community Development
- Early Education Services
- Family Center of Washington County
- Good Samaritan Haven
- Green Mountain United Way
- HIV/HCV Resource Center
- HOPE (Helping Overcome Poverty's Effects)
- HOPE Works
- Housing And Homelessness Alliance of Vermont
- Hunger Free Vermont
- Kelman-Mageau Real Estate Holdings LLC
- KidSafe Collaborative
- Lamoille Community House
- Lamoille Family Center
- Montpelier Community Market
- Mosaic Vermont, Inc.
- Pathways Vermont
- People's Health and Wellness
- Public Assets Institute
- Rainbow Bridge Community Center
- Rights & Democracy Vermont
- Seed & Sew
- Steps to End Domestic Violence
- Sunrise Family Resource Center
- The ACLU of Vermont
- The Janet S. Munt Family Room
- Turning Point Recovery Center of Springfield
- United Way of Addison County
- United Way of Lamoille County
- United Way of Northwest Vermont
- United Way of Windham County
- Vermont Community Action Partnership
- Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance
- VT Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health
- Vermont Foodbank
- Vermont Interfaith Action
- Vermont Language Justice Project
- Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence
- Vermont Parent Child Center Network
- Vital Communities
- Voices for Vermont's Children

Individuals:

- L'Tonya Johnson, MSW, Dartmouth Health & Independent Mental Consultant of Do Love, INC
- Erhard Mahnke, Retired, Sen. Sanders' Office & Former Coordinator, VT Affordable Housing Coalition
- Mary Gerisch, Bennington Housing Authority Administrator, Balance of State Continuum of Care (Member), Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont (Board Member)
- Mari Cordes, RN, former State Representative, Addison 4
- Peter Elwell, Groundworks Collaborative Board Chair, Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont Board member
- Fred Breunig, member VT Interfaith Action Affordable Housing & Homelessness organizing committee, member Guilford Community Church, UCC
- Amy Roth, VT Interfaith Action Board Member, Temple Sinai Social Action Committee chair