

To: Members of the Senate Judiciary and Senate Economic Development Committees

From: Rachyl Phillips, Burlington resident

Re: Comments on H.772 – *An act relating to residential rental agreements, eviction procedures, and the creation of the positive rental payment credit reporting pilot program*

Date: April 21, 2026

Dear Chair Hashim, Chair Clarkson, and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to share my family's experience as renters in Vermont and to offer perspective and support of H.772. My name is Rachyl Phillips. I am a former professional ballet dancer, teacher, and choreographer who became disabled in my early 30s after a severe and unexpected health decline. I have undergone more than 100 surgeries and continue to require ongoing care to stay alive. During the early period of medical uncertainty, my family came close to losing our housing. With support from community organizations, we eventually became tenants of Champlain Housing Trust (CHT), where we have now lived for 14 years.

Because of my experience, I care deeply about affordable housing and tenant protections. I also have the privilege of serving as a disabled resident representative on CHT's Board of Directors. I am writing today both as a tenant and as someone engaged supporting CHT's work – and I believe Vermont urgently needs to rethink how all tenants' rights are balanced in eviction proceedings.

CHT is a mission-driven landlord that works hard to maintain safe, clean, and equitable housing while also incorporating tenant protections in their leases and their work. Over many years in my apartment building, however, I have witnessed a difference in how tenant rights are applied under current law. Current law tends to focus on the rights of an individual facing eviction, while giving insufficient support or rights to all the tenants like me, or other families, who also deserve safe, stable, and peaceful homes.

In our building of 40 apartments, we have repeatedly experienced situations where the protections afforded to a single tenant, despite serious and ongoing lease violations, effectively overrode the safety of everyone else. In one prolonged case, a neighbor struggled with unsupported mental health crises and substance use, resulting in:

- Repeated, intentional property damage, including to the doors, walls, and elevator.
- Unsafe conditions and criminal incidents involving the tenant and people he allowed and encouraged to be in the building, in the hallways, and our stairwells.
- Persistent health and safety hazards, such as defecation, vomiting, and discarded needles from substance misuse.

- Fires set in hallways, and flooding that damaged other families' homes and belongings.
- Threats involving weapons, and repeated breaches of building security.
- Vulnerable residents, including children, people with disabilities, and a veteran who lost life sustaining medications to theft, were directly harmed.

This is just a small sampling (without some graphic descriptions) of what we endured as tenants in our building. Despite the severity of these issues, eviction proceedings stretched on for two years, even when the cumulative impact on other residents was substantial and well documented. CHT did what they could. But the result was dozens of tenants living in unsafe and unstable conditions, with little recourse. It also left the tenant in question in a setting that clearly did not meet his needs.

Sadly, this was not an isolated incident. We are currently facing a similar situation involving ongoing criminal activity, violence, and repeated police involvement tied to a unit in our building. Again, the process for resolving the issue has been lengthy, despite clear risks to other tenants.

I share these experiences not to assign blame to these individuals, but to highlight a systemic problem. In many of these cases, the tenants at the center of the issue need more appropriate support and housing that better fits their needs. Absent that, the current legal framework results in the burden of that unmet need on people like me, who are left to endure unsafe conditions for extended periods.

Tenant protections are essential. They create fairness and stability in the housing system. However, I believe our understanding of "tenant rights" must evolve. It should not refer only to the individual facing eviction, but to all tenants collectively. The rights of one household should not come at the expense of the safety, health, and housing stability of many others.

H.772 gives landlords the tools to better protect their tenants. I urge you to consider how eviction laws and procedures could move faster when there are documented patterns of harm to other tenants and ongoing threats to our safety.

Thank you for your time, your service, and your thoughtful consideration of this issue. I would be grateful to answer any questions or provide additional information.

Sincerely,

Rachyl Phillips