

*Draft Proposed Budget Language*

Sec. XXX GENERAL/EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE HOUSING

- (a) Funds appropriated to the Department for Children and Families in the General/Emergency Assistance program in fiscal year 2022 shall be used to provide emergency housing in accordance with program rules waived or varied under Act 6, Sec. 1 of 2021. The purpose of emergency housing is to ensure short-term housing for vulnerable segments of the population experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity to the extent that such housing does not exceed hotel/motel room capacity within the State and expenditures for such housing do not exceed available state and federal funds. The assistance provided under this section is not an entitlement and may be discontinued upon the expenditure of the appropriated funds.
- (b) During the COVID-19 pandemic the Department for Children and Families temporarily expanded eligibility for emergency housing through the General/Emergency Assistance program in response to the public health emergency. The General Assembly and the Administration acknowledge that this approach is neither financially nor programmatically sustainable. The Commissioner for the Department for Children and Families, in consultation with the emergency housing working group established by the House Appropriations Committee, has identified and shall implement new emergency housing eligibility criteria. The new eligibility criteria shall remain in effect for the duration of fiscal year 2022 unless there is a need to expand eligibility in response to a public health emergency or other emergency.
- (c) The Department for Children and Families is authorized to create 17 limited service positions to process applications for emergency housing and comply with federal funding requirements for state fiscal year 2022.

(d) The Commissioner for the Department for Children and Families may, by policy, provide emergency housing for a limited duration in adverse weather conditions when appropriate shelter space is not available.

Sec. XXX.1 HOUSING ASSISTANCE BENEFITS; FLEXIBILITY PROGRAM; COMMUNITY BASED ALTERNATIVES TO GENERAL ASSISTANCE EMERGENCY HOUSING

(a) For fiscal year 2022, the Department for Children and Families may continue to fund housing assistance programs within the General Assistance program to create flexibility to provide General Assistance benefits, as well as grants to support the establishment of community-based alternatives for temporary housing as part of the effort to reduce the number of individuals temporarily housed by the General Assistance program. The purpose of these housing assistance programs and community-based alternatives is to mitigate poverty and serve applicants more effectively than they are currently being served with General Assistance funds. Eligible activities shall include, among other things, the provision of shelter, overflow shelter, case management, transitional housing, deposits, down payments, rental assistance, upstream prevention, and related services that ensure that all Vermonters have access to shelter, housing, and the services they need to become safely housed. The Department may award grants to homeless and housing service providers for eligible activities. Where such housing assistance programs and grants are provided, and community-based programs are established, the General Assistance rules shall not apply. The assistance provided under this section is not an entitlement and may be discontinued should there not be sufficient funds.

Sec. XXX.2 EMERGENCY HOUSING WORKGROUP

(a) The Department for Children and Families shall continue to use the GA housing workgroup currently convened to make recommendations to the Commissioner of the Department for Children and Families on the design and implementation of a sustainable, long-term plan for

providing emergency housing for fiscal year 2023 that reduces and/or ends reliance on the General/Emergency Assistance Motel Voucher Program. This workgroup shall consider investments needed to build local capacity to support emergency housing needs, which may include funding, training, technical assistance, and planning support. The Department for Children and Families and workgroup shall also consider the Governor's proposed permanent housing initiative when developing its recommendations.

(b) On or before November 1, 2021, the Department for Children and Families shall submit a written report to the House Committees on Appropriations; General, Housing, and Military Affairs; and Human Services and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare with recommendations on the development of a sustainable, long-term plan for emergency housing.

(c) The Department shall continue to engage interested local and statewide parties, including but not limited to the Continua of Care, service providers, people with lived experience, and representatives of Vermont's health care system, in the design, implementation, and evaluation of housing assistance programs and community-based alternatives to General/Emergency Assistance emergency housing.

Sec. XXX.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REPORT

(a) The Department for Children and Families shall implement the identified sustainable housing plan on July 1, 2022 in line with recommendations made in the November 1, 2021 written report. The Department for Children and Families shall take into consideration steps necessary to ensure an effective and efficient transition that reduces and/or ends reliance on the General/Emergency Assistance Motel Voucher Program effective June 30, 2022.