

MEMO

TO: Joint Fiscal Committee

DATE: December 13, 2022

FROM: Kara Casey on behalf of members of the GA Working Group and Allies

RE: The Administration's \$15 Million General Fund Emergency Housing Proposal

I am writing today on behalf of the organizations whose names are signed below. We write to you with our perspective as members of the GA Working Group that was tasked by the legislature to provide our expertise and knowledge to help develop a plan for housing individuals who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless during this housing crisis and beyond, recognizing that there will always be some people who are in need of emergency housing even once additional affordable housing capacity is built.

Below is our response to the Agency of Human Services, Department of Children and Families Proposal for spending the \$15 million General Fund Emergency Housing Appropriation to support Vermonter's experiencing homelessness per Commissioner Chen's memo to the Joint Fiscal Committee on Dec. 7, 2022.

- 1. \$5,680,000 to increase and preserve Emergency Shelter capacity through capital investments (VHCB)** We support this funding to expand and preserve shelter capacity. We would add "renovation" to that as well, as to be clear that in order to preserve capacity and be prepared for any future public health crisis, renovation to existing shelter may be needed.
- 2. \$1,500,000 to temporarily expand the Vermont Rental Subsidy program (DCF)** We support this investment in the VRS program to serve these approximately 140 households with children. We would also support any expansion of the program beyond this identified population.
- 3. \$500,000 to the Housing Opportunity Grant Program to prevent homelessness (DCF)** We support this funding for homelessness prevention. We know that many households have relied on VERAP funding throughout the pandemic to maintain their housing. HOP funding is able to be quickly dispersed into communities who have experience in managing these funds.
- 4. \$1,000,000 for incentives to increase the amount of homelessness units within projects (VHCB)**
and
- 5. \$1,500,000 to fund the extremely low-income portion of the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (DHCD)**

While this group strongly believes in the importance of investing in long term affordable housing as key to ending homelessness, we do not believe that these are the funds to use. The legislature appropriated \$15,000,000 "reserved for the Department for Children Families emergency or transitional housing needs in the event federal emergency rental assistance funds are insufficient to meet needs in fiscal year 2023". In keeping with the intent of the legislature, we would propose using these funds either for extension of the DCF Transitional Housing Program, or expansion of the DCF General Assistance Emergency Housing Program.

6. \$4,820,000 to sustain the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program (DCF) We support using these funds to support the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program. We would also ask you to consider additional funding to expand eligibility for the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program once the period of Adverse Weather Conditions Policy ends, including extending the time limits and a clear plan for moving the remaining households in the Transitional Housing Program into GA.

If any additional dollars are available for addressing the immediate short term needs of unhoused households, we would ask the committee and the administration to consider:

- Provide additional funding for supportive services staffing. A key to supporting households in shelter, in gaining and maintaining housing is supportive services. Many of our shelters are struggling to hire and retain staff and many affordable housing providers are highlighting the partnerships with housing service providers as crucial to maintaining successful tenancy. When looking at available funding, services funding should be considered a critical investment.
- Consider investing additional funds to end family homelessness. We urge the legislature and the administration to work with partners throughout the state to come up with a plan to house the approximately 400 Households with children currently experiencing homelessness. We believe with the resources at hand, this can be accomplished.

In addition, we believe that there needs to be a larger conversation about what funding is available, what the timeline is for these funding sources and how emergency solutions created with short-term funding can bridge to more medium and long-term solutions with sustainable funding.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kara Casey, Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence

Josh Davis, Groundworks Collaborative

Paul Dragon, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity

Jonathan Farrell, Committee on Temporary Shelter

Rebecca Plummer, Vermont Legal Aid Inc

Michael Redmond, Upper Valley Haven

Sue Minter, Capstone Community Action

Martin Hahn, Vermont Coalition to End Homelessness

Sarah Russell, City of Burlington and CCHA Co-Chair