



May 14, 2025

The Honorable Ginny Lyons
Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
Vermont Senate
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

The Honorable Theresa Wood
Chair
House Committee on Human Services
Vermont House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Chair Lyons and Chair Wood:

The Vermont Mayors Coalition is pleased to see the Legislature working to transform the statewide response to Vermont's homelessness crisis as envisioned in H. 91 establishing the Vermont Homeless Emergency Assistance and Responsive Transition to Housing Program. Our cities are disproportionately feeling the impact of the state's current homelessness response – and we want to make sure there are adequate state resources and planning, as well as supports to municipalities to help mitigate cost shifts to municipal budgets.

A half century ago, Vermont consolidated the provision of human services to the state, relieving municipalities from the responsibility of providing healthcare and anti-poverty programs to Vermonters. As community leaders, we work closely with our community action agencies to help house the homeless. We've observed these organizations have some of the same obstacles to success the state has with being under-resourced and understaffed.

Municipalities serve as vital partners in this work; however, we are often under-resourced to engage in high-impact ways. To ensure we can be part of the planning process and support a robust community assessment and to offset the current impact-costs of the General Assistance Program and the anticipated future program considered in H. 91, we ask the Legislature to allocate direct funding assistance to municipalities. While we strongly advocate for municipal representation on the Regional Advisory Councils to be a "shall" instead of a "may", our cities lack funded capacity to work in true partnership with our CAP agencies – which is unfortunate given the expertise in public infrastructure we bring to the table. The state's policy decisions to locate hundreds of new and vulnerable residents in our communities continues to have a significant impact on our municipal budgets – including fire, police and emergency medical services, libraries, community services, and all frontline staff. We are spending significant amounts of local dollars to address strain on staff capacity, create shelters, pay for hazardous waste cleanups, and more.

As mayors, we hope for a clear transition plan from a state-administered program to a non-profit administered program. Municipalities have experienced repeatedly the challenges that arise from inadequate transition plans related to running the General Assistance Program. This has led to hundreds of unsheltered people with unmet needs being exited from motels and onto the streets of our

communities without effective coordination with us and without adequate plans for sheltering. It is imperative that an element of stability is present during this critical planning year and we advocate for lifting the 80-day motel stay-cap. When our communities are forced to operate from crisis response, we are unable to intentionally engage with proactive reform and systems-level work. We believe in order to meet the benchmarks outlined in the H.91 timeline, and to help ensure municipalities can assist with the creation or oversight of the program, stability for the households currently sheltered needs to be prioritized.

We also advocate for Legislative intent to decrease the threshold for activation of extreme cold weather shelter from -20 degrees to -10 degrees. Our municipalities are struggling with unprecedented numbers of very vulnerable people living unsheltered. While this is challenging in the summer months, when the season changes, this becomes deadly. Due to several factors including zero emergency shelter capacity, limited or no motel capacity, and the level of vulnerability and number of people living outside, it is imperative that this activation threshold be adjusted to reflect the needs across Vermont during our coldest months of the year.

Finally, we feel that it is vitally important to emphasize the need for state support for new permanent housing development. Without substantial increases in housing supply, all the shelters in the world won't solve the problem. Moreover, it is essential to continue to provide increased homeless support while simultaneously developing new housing. We cannot simply transfer the funds that we would have spent on shelter to permanent housing. Both are necessary, and will continue to be necessary for the foreseeable future. It is only with the combination of temporary shelter supports and permanent housing development that we can begin to make progress toward solving the epidemic of homelessness.

Thank you for considering these requests as you finalize H. 91.

Sincerely,

Chris Bearor
Mayor
City of Vergennes

Michael Doenges
Mayor
City of Rutland

Kristine Lott
Mayor
City of Winooski

Thom Lauzon
Mayor
City of Barre

Jack McCullough
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City of Montpelier

Emma Mulvaney-Stanak
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City of Burlington

Tim Smith
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City of St. Albans

Rick Ufford-Chase
Mayor
City of Newport