

The State of Vermont Fair Housing Analysis

Executive Summary

Introduction

Equal and free access to residential housing choice is a fundamental right critical to personal, professional, and community development. If equal opportunity is to become a reality, fair housing is a goal that government, public officials, and private citizens must embrace. In 2022, the State of Vermont updated the 2012 and 2017 Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AI) to further the goal of fair housing and satisfy the requirements of [the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974](#) as amended. The Fair Housing Act requires any State or Entitlement Community receiving federal funds to affirmatively further fair housing. The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) administers federal funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), including Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Recovery Housing Program (RHP), and other funding sources.

Note: This Fair Housing Analysis builds on the previous AIs conducted in 2012, 2017, and 2022, as many of their findings, observations, and proposed actions remain valid and important for guiding our work.

DHCD is creating the Fair Housing Analysis to align with the Consolidated Plan and the Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) timelines. The Consolidated Plan and HNA are HUD Program mandates also conducted every five years. The 2025 Consolidated Plan will utilize data from the HNA and findings from this Fair Housing Analysis (FHA).

The responsibility of compliance with the Federal Fair Housing Act extends to nonprofit organizations and other entities, including units of local government that receive federal funds through the state. To carry out its responsibility to affirmatively further fair housing, once every five years, the State analyzes the impediments to fair housing in Vermont and develops an action plan to address those impediments. This FHA covers all of Vermont except the City of Burlington, which receives its own allocation of funds from HUD. However, the city of Burlington is included in the discussion of statewide issues and trends where appropriate (i.e., areas of concentration, dissimilarity indices, etc.). Therefore, references to Vermont throughout this document that exclude Burlington will be noted, otherwise, Burlington is presumed to be included in the analysis.

DHCD engaged in an extensive consultation process with local public agencies, nonprofit organizations, and other interested entities to develop a community planning process for the Fair Housing Analysis. DHCD issued two online questionnaires, one for Housing Professionals and the other for the general public, to receive public input on Fair Housing issues and potential solutions for the State. In addition, DHCD gathered and analyzed data from a variety of sources, including the US Census, fair housing complaints received by HUD and Vermont's Human Rights Commission, HMDA lending and mortgage trends, Public Housing Authorities, the Vermont Real Estate Commission, etc. Data sources are noted throughout this report and in appendices.

HUD's Interim Final Rule for Restoring Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing

“HUD’s 2021 Interim Final Rule, [“Restoring Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Definitions and Certifications,”](#) requires program participants to submit certifications that they will affirmatively further fair housing in connection with their consolidated plans, annual action plans, and PHA plans. In order to support these certifications, the IFR creates a voluntary Fair Housing Analysis process for which HUD will provide technical assistance and support.

The IFR does not require program participants to undertake any specific type of Fair Housing Analysis to support their certifications, and commits HUD to providing technical assistance to those that wish to undertake Assessments of Fair Housing (AFHs), Analyses of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice (AIs), or other forms of Fair Housing Analysis. HUD is currently providing resources to assist program participants.”¹

Staff at DHCD participated in the HUD trainings referred to above where HUD approved utilizing a hybrid of an Assessment of Fair Housing and an Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing (AI). DHCD is titling this as a “Fair Housing Analysis” (FHA).

Lead Agency

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) prepares and implements the Fair Housing Analysis (FHA). Through grant programs and fair housing initiatives, DHCD works with an extensive network of nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and private entities. These community stakeholders were invited to participate in developing the 2024 FHA. Stakeholders helped identify barriers to fair housing choice and develop practical recommendations to eliminate impediments. Employees from DHCD and the Agency of Commerce and Community Development (ACCD) developed the 2024 FHA with input from these community stakeholders. The following individuals from these agencies were responsible for developing this document:

- Naomi Cunningham, Housing Program Administrator, DHCD
- Jayme Bauer, Community Development Specialist II, DHCD
- Shaun Gilpin, Housing Division Director, DHCD
- Maxwell Krieger, General Counsel, DHCD

Agency Consultation and Public Outreach

The Outreach Plan that DHCD developed provided a phased approach to gathering information and feedback and included:

- 1. Initial Stakeholder Outreach:** DHCD engaged with various of nonprofits, local governments, and industry leaders to better understand issues related to fair housing and inclusion. These organizations include Thriving Communities, community health professionals, property management and real estate organizations, Homeownership Centers, and Continuum of Care

¹<https://www.hud.gov/AFFH#:~:text=HUD's%202021%20Interim%20Final%20Rule,action%20plans%2C%20and%20PHA%20plans.>

organizations. [Appendix A](#) includes the comprehensive list of stakeholders DHCD engaged with while planning and writing the FHA.

2. **Housing Professional Feedback:** DHCD completed a statewide fair housing survey for nonprofit and housing professionals. The survey was launched at the November 2022 VHFA Statewide Housing Conference, and DHCD staff attended numerous other housing industry meetings and events, resulting in over 95 survey responses.
3. **Public Outreach and Feedback:** DHCD consulted with Vermont Legal Aid and CVOEO to design a statewide fair housing survey for the general public, focusing on ease of use and straightforward wording.
 - a. Met regularly with Continuum of Care organizations for input on reaching out to vulnerable Vermonters.
 - b. Partnered with community development and service organizations for the 2023 “Fair Housing Library Tour,” where DHCD staff and local nonprofit staff met with residents in libraries in 12 counties. Information on housing assistance, fair housing, and help with completing the fair housing survey was provided.
 - c. Over 200 surveys were completed statewide.
 - d. [Appendix A](#) provides details on the Fair Housing Tour and partner organizations.
4. **Coordinated Outreach to Immigrants and Refugees**
 - a. Partnered with the Vermont Landlords Association (VLA) and CVOEO for a comprehensive fair housing education and outreach Initiative that includes CVOEO Ambassadors attending multiple gatherings of refugee and immigrant groups to discuss fair housing and get feedback on the barriers they see in their respective languages.
5. **Review and Feedback on Draft FHA Executive Summary and Action Plan**
 - a. Provided a draft of the “Executive Summary” and “Impediments to Fair Housing, Corrective Action Plan and Performance Measures” to Thriving Communities and other community partners for their feedback and input. A copy of the complete draft FHA was also made available. See the Methodology section for the list of organizations that were consulted.

Demographic and Housing Observations

The following demographic and housing trends were noted throughout the Fair Housing Analysis, particularly in the [Housing](#) and [Demographics](#) sections.

- **Vermont has experienced significant population growth over the past fifty years, increasing 47.5% from 1970 to 2020.**

This growth has been notably concentrated in the most populous county in Vermont, Chittenden County. Chittenden County’s population more than doubled from 1970 to 2020, with the majority of this growth occurring in the 1980s and 1990s.
- **In the past 10 years, Communities of Color have more than doubled, increasing from 6.2% of the overall population in 2010 to 12.6% in 2020.**

Between 1990 to 2020, Communities of Color have sextupled (increased by a factor of 6) from 2.0% to 12.6% of the state’s total population. However, Vermont is still the second whitest state in the nation, with 89.8% of residents identifying as White.

- **People with disabilities were more than twice as likely to live in poverty as people without disabilities in 2021.**

In Vermont, 13.8% of the population, or approximately 1 out of every 7 Vermonters, reported at least one disability in 2021. An income disparity exists in Vermont, where 20.9% of people with disability are living below the poverty line. In comparison, only 8.8% of people without a disability live below the poverty line.

- **Areas of minority concentration are more likely to have a concentration of Low-to-Moderate Income (LMI) people.**

In Vermont, 18 of the 31 census tracts identified as concentrations of LMI people were also areas of minority concentration. Consequently, areas of minority concentration are more likely also to be areas of concentration of LMI people.

- **There is a significant disparity in the proportion of renter versus homeowner households that are transit-dependent.**

17.3% of renter households were transit-dependent, compared 2.3% of homeowner households.

- **Of the family households in Vermont only 14.4% are female-headed, but they make up nearly 50% of the family households living below the poverty line.**

- Female-headed households with children often have trouble obtaining housing, primarily as a result of lower incomes and the unwillingness of some landlords to rent their units to families with children. This is a clear violation of federal and state fair housing laws. Family households include married-couple families with or without children, single-parent families, and other families made up of related people.

- **White households had a homeownership rate of 74%, while Black Vermonters had the lowest homeownership of any racial group, at just 29%.**

There is a significant disparity in homeownership rates among different racial groups in Vermont. This is likely due to numerous historical and ongoing barriers that make it difficult for minorities to access homeownership opportunities and build generational wealth.

- **From 2020 to 2021, homeless individuals and households more than doubled. Since 2020, the number of homeless individuals has steadily climbed, increasing by 312% in just four years.**

This rapid increase is a combination of better tracking and a real increase in the number of homeless Vermonters. Vermont launched a statewide emergency hotel program to relieve economic hardships many households experienced during the onset of the COVID pandemic. Thousands of unhoused Vermonters applied for temporary hotel stays paid for through federal COVID relief funds, allowing the state to capture far better information about the scope of homelessness in the state. In addition, the number of homeless Vermonters has continued to increase post-pandemic, from 1,110 individuals pre-pandemic in 2020 to 3,458 in 2024, a 312% increase in just four years. Vermont has a per capita homelessness rate of 51 per 10,000 people, the 2nd highest nationally, according to the most recent 2023 HUD Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) report.

- **Long-term rentals have a vacancy rate as low as 1.2%. However, the high percentage of vacation/seasonal homes skew the overall rental vacancy rate.**
Vermont has the second-highest number of vacation homes per capita in the nation. 17.5% of the housing units in Vermont are vacation homes, meaning around 58,500 homes in Vermont are only used seasonally. If you were to exclude seasonal homes when calculating the Vermont vacancy rate, the rate could be as low as 1.2%.

Survey and Focus Group Findings

- **30% of respondents said that they experienced housing discrimination.**
Of those that reported discrimination, 56% cited a landlord or property manager as the source of the discrimination.
- **36% of survey respondents who experienced discrimination said it was based on disability, and 28% said it was based on receipt of public assistance.**
Additionally, 57.7% of the formal fair housing complaints made to the Vermont Human Rights Commission from 2017–2021 were based on disability.
- **50% of respondents who experienced discrimination also reported that their housing was unstable.**
- **Individuals from all of the Limited English Proficiency focus groups commented about the lack of affordability and units that are too small for their families.**

Fair Housing Achievements in Vermont

Since the publication of the last comprehensive Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing, Vermont has accomplished the following fair housing achievements:

- **Interpret and translate “The Definitive Guide to Renting in Vermont” and Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity’s (CVOEO) fair housing webinars into 9 languages.** As part of developing this Fair Housing Analysis, DHCD granted the CVOEO \$50,000 in funds for these purposes.
- **Expansions to the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP).**
 - **Forgivable Loans for Code Compliance Repairs in Occupied Units.** Like everywhere in the U.S., people in protected classes experience higher rates of poverty than the overall population. This results in protected classes living in more deteriorated housing. To help remedy this, property owners can now apply for VHIP 2.0 funding to make occupied rentals code compliant. Permanent displacement is prohibited, and there must be an agreed-upon plan between tenants and owners for temporary relocation when needed. Owners are responsible for accommodations during repairs.
 - **Fair Housing Training and Landlord Tenant Mediation for VHIP participants.** Training requirements were put in place for state-funded VHIP 2.0 participants. VHIP 2.0 was launched on March 25, 2024. As of December 23, 2024, 211 individuals have completed the fair housing training, with 271 participants registered.

- **Grants and Loans for Accessible Rentals.** The state updated VHIP to include grants or forgivable loans for up to \$70,000 per unit to rehab or create new rental housing units that meet accessibility requirements. The project can also include rehabbing or creating an accessible parking spot for individuals with disabilities. Households with at least one individual with a disability who is eligible to receive Medicaid-funded home, and community-based services can be prioritized for these units.
- **Comprehensive educational package for landlords and tenants in up to nine languages.** DHCD partnered with CVOEO and the Vermont Landlords Association (VLA) to create a comprehensive educational package for landlords and tenants in up to nine languages that includes:
 - An interactive training video on fair housing for landlords, with a quiz at the end. This video is now required for VHIP participants. VHIP is a state-funded rental housing development program.
 - Training videos for landlords and tenants on the Landlord-Mediation program funded through Emergency Rental Assistance funds. The training video for landlords is required for VHIP participants and will be provided to VHIP tenants.
 - DHCD will make the trainings publicly available for use in other programs and for general education.
- **New Farmworker Housing Supports.** In 2022, Champlain Housing Trust launched the Vermont Farmworker Housing Repair Loan Program (FWH), which allows farmers to make essential repairs and necessary improvements to their farmworker housing by offering forgivable loans of up to \$30,000. This is important for fair housing, because the majority of farmworkers who live on farms in Vermont are undocumented, and may be less likely to seek support when fair housing issues or unsafe living conditions arise for fear of deportation.
 - As of October 2023, the program has supported 35 projects improving 38 farmworker housing units in the state. The program has supported a significant number of projects in Addison and Franklin counties (37% and 14% of funded projects, respectively), which have the highest concentration of farmworker housing in the state.
- **Homes for All Toolkit.** Regulatory and financial barriers have made developing diverse homes on a small footprint harder and more complicated. As noted elsewhere in this document, housing professionals are interested in tools that help builders navigate permitting, design, and building processes for affordable housing. On March 14, 2024, the Department of Housing and Community Development launched the VT Homes for All Toolkit to a maximum-capacity crowd at the Toolkit Trainer Summit in Barre. This is the first of three phases designed to focus statewide attention on small-scale gentle infill and incremental development as a strategy to address Vermont’s housing and affordability crisis.
- **Training on accessibility standards for architects.** The 2017 Action Plan included an item stating, “The State should promote the development of training for architects and interior designers regarding compliance with the State’s accessibility standards for residential construction (20 VSA sec. 2907) as well as HUD’s Fair Housing Design Manual.” Courses on Fair Housing and Accessibility

are now available through continued education requirements for architects in Vermont ([link to training](#)).

Fair Housing Legislative Achievements

2022 and 2023 were historic years for housing-related legislation in Vermont. Through both the Omnibus Housing Bill, Act 182 of 2022, and the Rental Safety Bill, Act 181 of 2023, Vermont strengthened protections and made historic investments in fair housing. The 2024 Housing Bill H. 687 created new incentives to create or rehab affordable rental units that meet accessibility requirements.

Medicaid Permanent Supportive Housing Assistance Program

The Vermont Agency of Human Services, with the support of The Council on Housing and Homelessness, is designing and implementing a Medicaid Permanent Supportive Housing Assistance Program. The program plans to serve 100 Vermont households exiting homelessness during its first year. *Vermont Council on Housing and Homelessness, Dec. 2023, [2023 Report: Recommendations to support affordable housing development and help reduce and prevent homelessness](#).*

Expanded Protections for Harassment

The 2022 Omnibus Housing Bill, Act 182, addressed several fair housing issues, including strengthening protections against harassment and unfair housing practices. This legislation defines the term “harass” as engaging in unwelcome conduct *that detracts from, undermines, or interferes with the person’s terms, conditions, privileges, or protections in the sale or rental of a dwelling or other real estate or in the provision of services or facilities in connection with a dwelling or other real estate* based on a protected status. Additionally, this bill expanded who can report unlawful housing harassment to include third-party individuals. This means that more people can report harassment on another person’s behalf, a vital expansion of housing protection because harassment can go unreported for several reasons, including:

- A lack of awareness about how and where to file a complaint;
- To avoid confrontations with prospective landlords (especially in a tight rental market such as Vermont’s);
- People may be unaware that discrimination is occurring because they do not have the benefit of comparing their treatment with that of another home seeker;
- People may not be aware that discrimination is against the law, and that there are legal remedies to address the situation; and
- Households may be more focused on finding decent housing, and may prefer to avoid going through the process of filing a complaint.

Prospective, current, or past renters or home buyers may file complaints regarding harassment, which will be investigated and followed up based on the findings. Refer to the [Fair Housing Complaints](#) section to learn more about housing discrimination complaints in Vermont or how to file a report.

First Generation Homebuyers Program

In 2022, the Vermont Legislature passed Act 182, which provided \$1 million in funding for a First-Generation Homebuyer Program. The program offers down payment assistance to households historically sidelined from homeownership. This provides an opportunity for traditionally underserved households to build wealth through homeownership. The Vermont Housing Finance Agency (VHFA) is administering the program and has planned robust outreach to BIPOC Vermonters and individuals who have been in the foster care system.

Based on data from the 2020 U.S. Census, Vermont has a population of approximately 643,000, with about 38,500 BIPOC Vermonters (approximately 6% of the overall population).² A recent American Communities Survey (ACS) shows that homeownership for BIPOC residents ranges from 21% for Black Vermonters to 50.4% for Hispanic Vermonters. White Vermonters, however, have a significantly higher homeownership rate of 72.3%.³

The First-Generation Homebuyer Program will facilitate opportunities for underserved Vermonters to become homeowners and build wealth. “Recognizing that Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color have historically not had access to capital for homeownership purchases and have been systemically discriminated against in the housing market,” the enabling legislation requires that this program does extensive outreach to organizations that work with BIPOC Vermonters.⁴ By supporting these historically underserved populations, this program will help to further the goals of fair housing throughout the State of Vermont.

Even with down payment assistance opportunities, significant barriers exist for BIPOC and other underrepresented first-generation homebuyers. For example, renters’ credit scores often do not reflect their rental history. This is starting to change, but in many cases, renters need to be proactive in asking landlords to report rent payments through an online service for rent to be reported to the credit bureaus.⁵ The First-Generation Homebuyers Program is a step in the right direction. However, more work needs to be done in Vermont and across the United States.

Rental Safety

Also passed in 2022, Act 181, the Rental Safety initiative, will help make rental units safer for tenants. Act 181 allows the State Division of Fire Safety to enforce rental health and safety codes in addition to completing fire safety inspections. This is critical for communities with overstretched and volunteer code enforcement teams.

While the Fair Housing Act intends to provide equitable access to housing for people in protected classes, this access has limited benefit if the housing offered isn’t in safe and decent conditions. The

² US Census: [Census.gov/Library/America Counts: Stories Behind the Numbers/STATE PROFILES: 2020 Census/VERMONT: 2020 Census](https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/2020/states/VT.html)

³ The University of Vermont, Vermont Legislative Service, https://www.uvm.edu/sites/default/files/Department-of-Political-Science/vlrs/EconomicIssues/Housing_Assistance.pdf

⁴ Vermont Act Number 182 of 2022, Section 2(c).

⁵ Money.com, How to Use Rent Payments to Increase Your Credit Score, <https://money.com/how-to-build-credit-with-rent-payments/>

Rental Safety initiative will help provide safe, decent rental housing throughout the State of Vermont and benefits low-income families, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

Protected Classes

Vermont added abuse victims as a protected class under the Vermont Fair Housing and Public Accommodations Act. This protection applies to victims of abuse, sexual assault, or stalking. This update was made in 2019 under Act 48, and means Vermont now has protections for six classes that are not included under the Federal Fair Housing Act.

Potential Impediments to Fair Housing and Proposed Actions

Participants in the Limited English Proficiency (LEP) focus groups stated that clarity is needed about the Fair Housing complaint process and timeline. People want to see the results of the complaint process to trust that the system will work for them.

Proposed Action: Work with nonprofits/partners that help file complaints to create videos or other educational materials that can be shared with the public in multiple languages. Real stories from people who have filed complaints about their experience would be preferable, especially a story from a LEP Vermonter. All materials should also make it clear that there is no cost to file a complaint.

The last fair housing testing audit measuring housing discrimination in the Vermont rental market was conducted by Vermont Legal Aid’s Housing Discrimination Law Project (HDLP) in 2013. Unfortunately, a more recent Rental Discrimination Report for Vermont is not currently available.

Proposed Action: An updated Rental Discrimination Report would provide valuable information that would allow Vermont to affirmatively further Fair Housing. A report that includes discrimination based on Vermont’s protected classes and the federally protected classes would be especially helpful.

Addressing Homelessness — From 2020 to 2021, the number of homeless individuals and households more than doubled. Since 2020, the number of homeless individuals has steadily climbed, increasing by 297% in just 3 years.

Proposed Action: Increase investments in permanent affordable housing, including state funding for project-based vouchers through VSHA. Also, base fund existing programs that are successfully creating or maintaining affordable rentals units and have received multiple rounds of one-time funding, including VHIP 2.0 and the Manufactured Housing Improvement and Repair program (MHIR). This base funding will make it easier to retain staff for the program, and reduce the administrative burden related to evolving rules and funding sources.

The portion of Vermont households headed by someone who is at least 55 years old has increased steadily, from 44% in 2010 to 53% in 2020. By 2029, 54% of Vermont’s households will be headed by someone in this age group.

Proposed Action: Monitor the progress of the Medicaid Permanent Supportive Housing Assistance Program and expand the program where necessary. **Over 50% of fair housing complaints submitted to the VT Human Rights Commission, and 36% of the 2023 Statewide Fair Housing Survey respondents who experienced discrimination said it was based on disability. Disability has been the number one reason cited for housing discrimination in Vermont since the “Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing” was released in 2013.**

Proposed Action: Provide small incentives to landlords for reasonable accommodations, perhaps through an existing program like VSHA’s Landlord Relief Program. For example, in 2024, the average cost of a wheelchair ramp ranges from \$2,500–3,500, so a grant up to \$3,500 would provide needed accommodations for a disabled tenant without an added out-of-pocket expense for the landlord.

In 2021, the Corporation for Supportive Housing described Vermont in this way, “Statewide, systems are stressed beyond capacity, hundreds, if not thousands of social service positions are vacant, emergency efforts are strained, and homeless encampments are forming and growing in a number of communities. The service needs of those individuals, families, and communities are only growing in acuity and complexity.”⁶

Proposed Action: As recommended by the Vermont Council on Housing and Homelessness, expand the Vermont Department of Mental Health Housing First program and increase recovery housing and residential therapeutic group homes. ⁶ Through the Housing First Program (as of July 2023), 870 Vermonters ended the cycle of homelessness with an 87% housing retention rate at an average cost of \$53 per night.⁷

Historically, Communities of Color have had significant barriers to homeownership opportunities that would build generational wealth. This is reflected in the vast disparity in homeownership rates among different racial groups in Vermont. For example, white households had a homeownership rate of 74%, while Black Vermonters had the lowest homeownership of any racial group at just 29%.

Proposed Action: Continue funding the First-Generation Homebuyer Program at its existing funding level of \$1 million per year. This program has assisted BIPOC Vermonters with first-time home purchases at a disproportionate rate. Although Communities of Color only make up 13 % of Vermont’s population, they comprise 20% of the households supported by this program.

⁶ Corporation for Supportive Housing, December 2021. [Strengthening the Housing and Services System: Recommendations and Strategies for Vermont.](#)

⁷ <https://www.pathwaysvermont.org/programs/housing-first/>

Vermont does not have recent or accurate data related to the number of rental and housing advertisements that include discriminatory language. More monitoring of rental and housing advertisements is needed to both assess the extent to which these advertisements include discriminatory language and to address these issues with the property owners and publishers of these materials.

Proposed Action: Provide ongoing funding to Vermont Legal Aid and the Vermont Human Rights commission to enhance their efforts to identify and address housing advertisements that include discriminatory language.

Items from 2017 Action Plan Not Completed to be Continued

The State, through DHCD, should develop a Fair Housing Training Guide for permitting officials and affordable housing developers to ensure everyone involved in the development of affordable housing is aware of their legal rights and obligations under the federal and state Fair Housing Acts.