

Task Force Recommendations 10/29/2024: These may not be for today's meeting and may be amended prior to next meeting. We will also have a recommendation on how to reduce reliance on motels at the next meeting. Amy Johnson (Vermont Care Partners), Shelby Lebarron (Lived Experience Expert), Brenda Siegel (VCIL Representative and EHVT ED):

Charge 1:

Appeals Process:

All appeals should include remaining sheltered until the appeals process is complete. In all other benefits, benefits can be given retroactively, however, in this benefit people completely lose shelter while awaiting an appeal with no cure possible.

At the time of denial applicants should be given a denial letter utilizing the denial notification process outlined in our previous recommendation. Applicants should be informed of their right to appeal and informed that they do not have to decide at the time of denial if they so choose. Households should receive information on how to contact all organizations that take new applicants or referrals specific to representing or supporting applicants through fair hearings. All such organizations should also be named with contact information on the denial letter so that households can access any available support for their fair hearings process.

Charge 3:

Department Role and Responsibilities.

The department should have regular accurate counts for who is in and out of the GA Program including numbers of people in each household. Where possible information on why people left. This may be represented in a recent change to documentation, if so, that should continue.

CHINS

If the state opens a CHINS case for a particular household, they should not exit that household from emergency shelter. That child is now considered in the custody or household in observation of the state. That means that exiting these families is putting children under the states custody in unsafe and unsheltered situations. This also better leans toward the goal of where of in an open CHINS case, keeping children with their parents or kinship caregivers where possible. This commitment to our children must include shelter.

DCF Relationship to Providers and lived experience experts:

Required community stakeholder input. Currently this input is inauthentic and works in less of a participatory model. What is needed is authentic, participatory, community stakeholder perspectives to inform system and care delivery improvements prior to decisions being made about these improvements.

Additionally we recommend creating a lived experience advisory committee to the DCF Commissioner as was recommended in House Human Services bill H. 879 from the 2024 legislative session

Conduct challenges.

Periods of ineligibility should be removed as condemning people to the outdoors is not a humane or data driven strategy to address complex needs and challenges. Often this outcome relies on only the word of a hotel staff or owner, there is no true due process. Challenges related to either conduct or more often a person's disability should instead be addressed using the same principles as a Housing First Model, individuals should be met where they are at to work with them on addressing these challenges, when necessary working with the clients to households to an environment that has a better chance at success, understanding that this may take multiple tries to meet the same strategy. This does not prohibit a hotel from getting a no trespass, addressing challenges through the criminal legal system or choosing not to renew a household. It only prevents the practice of Periods of Ineligibility that most often impact people with significant disabilities.