

TO: The General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force
FROM: The Vermont Community Action Partnership
RE: Recommendations for Inclusion in the Task Force's Report to the General Assembly
November 19, 2024

Dear Members of the General Assistance Emergency Housing Task Force,

We represent the Vermont Community Action Partnership (VCAP), which includes five Community Action Agencies serving close to 50,000 Vermonters statewide each year. VCAP provides significant assistance to people in Vermont facing homelessness. For six decades, Community Action Programs have led the way in helping people in Vermont move out of poverty. We are here to partner with the State of Vermont to find policy solutions that achieve our collective goals.

We believe the State of Vermont – our government and our people – can and must make the choice to shelter and support every person in Vermont. Vermont's GA Emergency Housing Program should support this choice. Sheltering people is the most affordable option – it's safer for the whole community, and more cost effective than an endless cycle of crisis and costly crisis response.

VCAP requests that the Task Force include two specific recommendations in its forthcoming report to the General Assembly.

- 1. Ensure adequate levels of funding for homelessness prevention services (case management, housing navigation and housing retention). Work with providers to determine what's needed and ensure funds are available.**

Housing prevention services reduce reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing, which fulfills one of the duties that the General Assembly assigned to the Task Force ("provide recommendations on... strategies to reduce reliance on hotels and motels for emergency housing").

Homelessness prevention services - including case management, housing navigation, and housing retention - can stop homelessness before it starts, and house homeless people faster. These services help people address diverse emerging challenges so they can secure - and thrive in - stable housing. Homelessness prevention services help hundreds of people in Vermont avoid homelessness every year. They forestall the need for hotel/motel stays, and reduce the duration of those stays when they are needed.

Dozens of case management positions statewide depend on state funding that expires at the end of FY25. Adequate funding is required to retain and ensure continuity for critical staff working on the front lines every day to prevent people in Vermont from becoming homeless, and to shorten the duration of time unhoused people remain unsheltered or in temporary housing.

- 2. Support the development of a Peer Coaching training and certification program, to supplement and augment case management in support of the service navigation needs of people facing homelessness.**

Workforce challenges have led to delays in the provision of case management and homelessness prevention services to those who need them. Peer Coaching is a model that has been deployed successfully in other sectors to equip people with lived experience to provide navigation services to their peers - we believe this model can help to address workforce shortages in the provision of homelessness prevention services.

VCAP is ready to partner with the State of Vermont to develop and implement a Peer Coaching training and certification program to supplement and augment case management in support of the service navigation needs of people facing homelessness.

Thank you for considering these recommendations, and we look forward to seeing them incorporated into Task Force's upcoming report to the House Committee on Human Services and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare.

Respectfully,

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Southeastern Vermont Community Action

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BROC Community Action

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