

September 25, 2024

Governor Phil Scott
Office of Governor Phil Scott
109 State Street, Pavilion
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Governor Scott,

We are shelter and service providers, advocates, municipalities, and those with interest from both the private and public sector from across Vermont who are witnessing the unconscionable harms created by the changes to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program. As our state's shelter and service system was already beyond capacity before this latest crisis, we are at the point of giving tents to families with young children and triaging cases to focus on keeping people literally alive. This is a humanitarian crisis and requires immediate action by the state. As Vermont's Governor, you have unique powers that can be immediately tapped to address this crisis. As such, we call on you to immediately:

- Use your power under the state's emergency management provisions (20 V.S.A. § 1) to proclaim a state of emergency and provide within each region of the state 24-hour, trauma-informed, safe, accessible, stable, and non-congregate emergency shelter for vulnerable Vermonters unsheltered by the changes to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program in Act 113;
- Use your power under Chapter II, Section 20, Vermont Constitution to call a special session of the Vermont Legislature to remove the caps that limit the number of hotel/motel rooms available per night and the number of nights available to eligible participants under the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program; or
- Direct the Vermont Agency of Human Services to exercise existing authority and spending capacity within the Vermont Agency of Human Services to provide within each region of the state 24-hour, trauma-informed, safe, accessible, stable, and non-congregate emergency shelter for vulnerable Vermonters unsheltered by the changes to the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program in Act 113.

Between September 15 and October 8 over 1,000 of Vermont's most vulnerable households - including seniors, families with children, those with disabilities, and people who are pregnant- will lose their shelter through the state's General Assistance Emergency Housing Program (GA Program).¹ This crisis is the result of legislation passed earlier this year and signed by you that set a maximum number of of annual days (80 days) that eligible households² could receive emergency housing in a hotel or motel

¹ Vermont Dept. of Children and Families, August 31st Housing Report, p. 7, Aug. 29, 2024, available at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Act-113-DCF-Housing-Report-8.31.2024.pdf>.

² Eligibility is limited to: (1) is 65 years of age or older; (2) has a disability that can be documented by: (A) receipt of Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance; or (B) a form developed by the Department as a means of documenting a qualifying disability or health condition that requires: (i) the applicant's name, date

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under the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program³ and a maximum number of hotel and motel rooms available between September 15, 2024 and November 30, 2024 and between April 1, 2025 and June 30, 2025.⁴

This mass unsheltering is happening on top of a shelter system that is already over capacity. There is currently a statewide shelter capacity for 541 households, and all are full.⁵ The 1,059 households who have lost or will lose their shelter by October 8 through the GA Program are in addition to the state's 541 household shelter capacity.⁶

In addition to the immediate steps outlined above, we also urge you to invest in and support the long-term solutions to Vermont's housing and homelessness crisis.

Vermont's homelessness crisis surpassed another record this year. According to the 2024 PIT count, there were 3,458 unhoused Vermonters in a single night, including 737 children and 646 Vermonters 55 years old or older.⁷ This number represents a five percent increase over Vermont's previous record year in 2023.⁸ To make matters worse, Black Vermonters are 5.6 times more likely than white Vermonters to be unhoused this year.⁹ And, Vermont's PIT count numbers are an undercount, as it reflects only the people who engaged with our state's dedicated and perpetually under-resourced shelter and service providers on the PIT count day.

of birth, and the last four digits of the applicant's Social Security number or other identifying number; (ii) a description of the applicant's disability or health condition; (iii) a description of the risk posed to the applicant's health, safety, or welfare if temporary emergency housing is not authorized pursuant to this section; and (iv) a certification of a health care provider, as defined in 18 V.S.A. § 9481, that includes the provider's credentials, credential number, address, and phone number; (3) is a child 19 years of age or under; (4) is pregnant; (5) has experienced the death of a spouse, domestic partner, or minor child that caused the household to lose its housing; (6) has experienced a natural disaster, such as a flood, fire, or hurricane; (7) is under a court-ordered eviction or constructive eviction due to circumstances over which the household has no control; or (8) is experiencing domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, human trafficking, hate violence, or other dangerous or life threatening conditions that relate to violence against the individual or a household member that caused the household to lose its housing.

³ Act 113, Sec. E.32, (b)(2).

⁴ Act 113, Sec. E.32, (b)(1).

⁵ Because Vermont is a shelter first state, these 541 beds are all filled before someone is offered General Assistance Emergency Housing. See, Vermont Dept. of Children and Families, August 31st Housing Report, p. 15, Aug. 29, 2024, available at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Act-113-DCF-Housing-Report-8.31.2024.pdf>.

⁶ GA Emergency Housing Program as of September 16, 2024, available at <https://dcf.vermont.gov/Addressing-and-Preventing-Unsheltered-Homelessness>.

⁷ HHAV, et. al., 2024 Vermont's Annual Point-in-Time Count, June 2024, available at <https://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-PIT-Report-final.pdf>.

⁸ HHAV, et. al., 2024 Vermont's Annual Point-in-Time Count, June 2024, available at <https://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-PIT-Report-final.pdf>.

⁹ There were 2,904 white people unhoused and 254 Black people unhoused. The total state population (according to U.S. Census) for White people is 577,751 and is 9,034 for Black people. The ratio for white is 1 in 198.95 people and Black is 1 in 35.56 people. See, HHAV, et. al., 2024 Vermont's Annual Point-in-Time Count, June 2024, available at <https://helpingtohousevt.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/2024-PIT-Report-final.pdf>.

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The underlying cause of Vermont's housing and homelessness crisis is the severe shortage of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes¹⁰ and a widening gap between incomes and housing costs.¹¹ To solve this crisis, Vermont must make sustained, long-term investments across all areas that have contributed to Vermont's housing and homelessness crisis, including funding to construct new permanently affordable housing, rehabilitate existing structures into affordable housing, increase middle-income home ownership, and more.

Vermont must also invest in proven solutions to homelessness: providing individuals with immediate access to housing and voluntary supportive services. Research irrefutably shows that providing stable, affordable, accessible housing and voluntary supportive services is the most effective approach for ending homelessness.¹²

Thank you for your consideration of our urgent request.

Sincerely,

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¹⁰ National Low Income Housing Coalition, No State Has an Adequate Supply of Affordable Rental Housing for the Lowest-Income Renters, available at <https://nlihc.org/gap>.

¹¹ National Low Income Housing Coalition, How Much Do You Need to Earn to Afford a Modest Apartment in Your State?, available at <https://nlihc.org/oor>.

¹² National Low Income Housing Coalition, The Evidence is Clear: Housing First Works, available at <https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/Housing-First-Evidence.pdf>.

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