



Vermont Interfaith Action

Transforming People and Communities

March 14, 2023

To: The Appropriations Committees and the leadership and full membership of the VT House and Senate, the Administration of Governor Phil Scott, and all the citizens of Vermont!

We will have a crisis of astounding proportions this summer! If that sounds alarmist, it only hints at how alarming it will be for Vermonters experiencing homelessness and the cities, towns and villages of Vermont that will need to respond to people without shelter in their communities. Despite all the talk about housing being everyone's number one priority, the only plan offered for this summer, fall, and next winter, is a massive UNHOUSING of those currently in motel-based shelter.

The State of Vermont has been spending \$6-7 Million a month to provide motel-housing for 1,800 households (2,800 individuals) as of January 2023. The Vermont Legislature and the Scott administration are on track to allocate less than half that amount in their current budget for FY24 (from July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024).

Nobody feels that motel-housing has been ideal, but turning half of the people in motel-housing out into the street is unacceptable! And it won't save money! Close to 1,000 of our neighbors will experience the very real trauma, lack of safety, and deprivation that comes from living without any shelter. There is literally nowhere for them to go. All of our communities will absorb the increased costs of public safety, emergency medical systems, public health and sanitation, and physical and mental health resources, and at a time that staffing of those services is already severely strained.

Given this looming crisis, this is what we need immediately – an FY24 State Budget that:

- **Addresses the scale** of our current reality: \$72 M to DCF for motel-based or alternative shelter will cover the next 12 months.
- **Funds the creation of alternatives** to motel-based shelter: \$40 M to VHCB will expand shelter capacity throughout the state by 120 beds.
- **Provides safe and supportive shelter** that enables people to attain permanent housing: \$20 M to supplement HOP grants will add support services and housing navigation services to those in the state's shelter system.
- **Expands evidence-based human service support models** (such as Pathways VT, SASH, and Family Supportive Housing) that have proven effective in assisting people to obtain and retain permanent housing: \$6.9 M will expand these services to the scale of need statewide.

For over 30 years, the State of Vermont has consistently made decisions that limited the development and funding of affordable housing. Furthermore, we failed to set the minimum wage at a level that would cover basic needs, such as rising rents.

Because of these decisions, it was entirely predictable that we would have a housing crisis and that those most affected would be those with the least resources to respond. We are all culpable, and we are all morally responsible for providing safe and secure shelter and support until permanent housing becomes available. This is the responsibility of the State of Vermont, and we expect you as our leaders to make it happen.

Signed:

Colby Lynch, currently Homeless in the Motel Program (Barre)
Rev. Earl Kooperkamp, Church of the Good Shepherd, Barre
Rev. Ed Sunday-Winters, Greensboro UCC
Rev. Paul Sangree, Vermont Conference United Church of Christ (UCC)
Rev. Scott Neal, St. Paul's Episcopal Church, White River Junction
Rev. Joan Javier-Duval, Unitarian Church of Montpelier and VIA Board Member
Rev. Rameen Zahed, The Old Meeting House, East Montpelier
Rev. Jennie Anderson, St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, Norwich
Rev. Leigh McCaffrey, Barre Congregational Church
Rev. Katelyn Macrae, Richmond Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. David Cray, Society of Saint Edmund
Rev. Elisa Lucozzi, Guilford Community Church, UCC
Rev. Dr. Shawn E. Bracebridge, Dummerston Congregational Church, UCC
Dr. Judith Hutchinson, Universalist Unitarian Congregation of St. Johnsbury
Chief Druid Fearn Lickfield, Green Mountain Druid Order
The Rev. Dr. Scott Couper, Centre Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Roger Brown, Centre Congregational Church, UCC
Rabbi Amy Small, Ohavi Zedek Synagogue

Rev. Rebecca Sommons
Rev. Sally May
Rev. William Neil
Brother Thomas Berube
Rev. David Larcombe
Rev. Catherine Cooke
Rev. David Cray
Rev. Laura Engelken
Deacon Sally Tappan
Rev. Jean S. Jersey
Rev. Greta Getlein
Elder Susan Brooks
Rev. Patricia Stratton
Rev. Beth Ann Maier
Rev. Terry Hanley
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Rev. Debbie Ingram
Rev. Kim Marie Glynn
Rev. David Larcombe
Rev. Lise Sparrow
Rev. Marjorie MacNeill
Rev. Carole Carlson
Rev. Joanne Giannino
Rev. Donavee Copenhaver
Rev. Kim Hardy
Religious Sister Francine Maas
Rev. Kerry Cameron
Rev. Amy Pitton
Pastor Joanne Thomas
Mother Nancy Detra
Rev. Jonathan Stratton
The Rev'd Canon Walter Brownridge
Bishop Shannon MacVean-Brown

Barbara Thompson, Racial Justice Group of Unitarian Church of Montpelier
Tom Dalton, Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform
Kenneth Russell, Executive Director of Another Way
Pastor Karla Kelley, Repairer of the Breach Restoring and Rebuilding Women, Men and Family
Zhanna Gordon, Temple Sinai
Donna Lee, First Congregational United Church of Christ, Burlington
David Shiman, Temple Sinai
Pamela Walker, member of Unitarian Church of Montpelier

Richard A Butz, Council President at Ascension Lutheran Church, South Burlington
Theresa Lever, Bethany United Church of Christ, Montpelier
Linda Webster, Church of the Good Shepherd
Lisa Northup, College Street Congregational Church
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Spencer Jarrett, Retired Sexton
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