



VIA 
Vermont Interfaith Action

Key issues for 2023



THE VERMONT HOUSING CRISIS

THE PROBLEM AND WHAT WE CAN DO ABOUT IT

Before COVID, the number of Vermonters without a fixed and adequate residence on any given day averaged 1,000 to 1,500. Now that number is 2,500.

12,000 households statewide depend on the VERAP program

Vermont has the second lowest rental vacancy rate in the nation, at 2.4%.

One year from now, Vermont will have exceeded half a billion dollars in spending over seven years to address homelessness.

Vermont's housing programs are run by several state entities: the Agency for Human Services, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Vermont Housing Finance Agency and the Vermont State Housing Authority.

Vermont Interfaith Action is proposing 6 STEPS to address the housing crisis and house ALL VERMONTERS.

* All data from state government sources as of Fall 2022.

SIX STEPS TO HOUSE ALL VERMONTERS

WWW.VIAVT.ORG

- 1. COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY**
Plan for an overall strategy in Vermont to shelter people now and move them into permanent housing.
- 2. ACCURATE DATA**
Compile and base decisions on accurate data regarding both private housing stock and public housing options to keep the cost of housing (home ownership and rental) at 30% of the median income in a region, and the rental vacancy rate at 4% in each region.
- 3. STATEWIDE RENTAL REGISTRY**
Put in place a statewide rental registry and inspection system to make it easier to identify and sustain rentals that are affordable, safe and decent for all Vermonters.
- 4. "HOUSING FIRST" MODEL**
Support and expand the "Housing First" model to ensure that those who need services can obtain them along with decent housing.
- 5. INNOVATIVE ALTERNATIVES**
Explore and quickly develop and implement innovative housing alternatives, such as ADUs, SROs staffed with support, and tiny houses.
- 6. HOUSING RETENTION**
Mitigate the number of evictions and increase housing retention through "just cause eviction" and "right to counsel" requirements.





Housing Policy Paper

Background to the current housing crisis and recommendations for a way forward in 2023.

The Housing Crisis

By almost any measure, housing is a crisis in Vermont.

During the past few years, homelessness has increased, available housing is in very short supply and the number of households living in insecure housing is too large and increasing. As bad as the crisis is currently, the trends for the future are even more alarming. The cost of this crisis to Vermont is enormous: funds spent on emergency services for the homeless or those in danger of homelessness are vast; without safe and affordable housing, the Vermont work force is badly hobbled and will remain static at best; health care costs are rapidly inflated by conditions stemming from homelessness and the risk of undergoing a housing crisis; and finally, the harsh weather conditions make homelessness in Vermont truly matter of life and death.

Just a quick look at some of the measures gives a great deal of insight into Vermont's housing crisis. In the few years prior to the onset of the pandemic, there were between 1,000 and 1,500 people on any average day who could be counted as literally homeless, without a regular and fixed safe and adequate residence. The pandemic expanded this number rapidly, and during the past two years the annual "point in time" count (an annual survey of those in shelters, those found living outdoors, but not always counting those not found outdoors or living "doubled up with friends or family) has recorded over 2,500 homeless Vermonters. In addition to those who are literally homeless, there are many lower income Vermonters who depend on subsidies and other forms of assistance to pay for their rent. Currently, there are about 12,000 households statewide enrolled in the VERAP (Vermont Emergency Rental Assistance Program) that depend on rental assistance to stay housed. A large percentage of the rental assistance programs are limited Federal funds which will expire in the next few months. Finally, over the past few years vacant rental properties have shown a steady decrease. Recently it was reported that Vermont has the second lowest rental vacancy rate in the nation, at 2.4% for



the second quarter of this year. As the report noted, “an extremely low rental vacancy rate can signal a scarcity of affordable housing options.”¹ These factors and others are at the root of the housing crisis in Vermont.

Perhaps the deepest meaning of the housing crisis that we face in Vermont is the effect it has on the lives of Vermonters. Two examples show the depth of this housing crisis:

Recently, at a press conference held by Vermont Interfaith Action on September 12, 2022 in Montpelier, Bridget Mientka spoke of the ordeal she and her family face because of rising rents. Both she and her husband, an Army veteran, work full-time jobs. She said that they, “received word from their landlord earlier this summer that they and their two children would be evicted, for no cause, within 30 days from their two-bedroom Colchester home. Their landlord also planned to start charging \$2,200 monthly for the apartment they had paid \$1,500 a month to occupy. After much pleading, their landlord agreed to let them stay until the end of the school year, Mientka said, and to increase the rent a lower but nevertheless steep amount — to \$1,900. ‘We don't have another \$400 a month for rent. If we did, we would live in a three-bedroom apartment where our son and daughter could have their own room...The feeling of helplessness to provide stable housing for our children has sent us into a spiral of anxiety and depression.’ ”² This example, and countless others, describe the true cost of the housing crisis in Vermont.

Since the summer of 2022, Hedding Methodist Church in Barre has provided shelter for a homeless working family. Jennie and Mike M. and their three children, ages, 14, 10 and 7 lost their housing after the rent increased and their automobile needed repairs. Mike is a Navy veteran and both he and his wife Jennie work full-time in low wage jobs. Ironically, early in the Covid pandemic they both worked at a motel they helped to keep open for homeless people. As

¹<https://vermontbiz.com/news/2022/august/17/study-vermont-has-2nd-lowest-rental-vacancy-rate>

²<https://vtdigger.org/2022/09/12/as-pandemic-era-housing-assistance-ramps-down-advocates-call-on-scott-to-redo-housing-plan/>

Jennie noted, there are just no real options for working families as rent increases and inflation takes its toll. She feels very blessed that the Hedding congregation has shown them such a great deal of love and care during this housing crisis and that this is “meant to be” as she and her husband work hard to get their family life stabilized again so that her children can have a bright future.

Roots of the Vermont Housing Crisis

The housing crisis in Vermont has been in the making for many years. As the Rev. Deacon Beth Ann Maier has written,

For more than three decades, we have made decisions that resulted in insufficient housing for all our neighbors. We made decisions that resulted in insufficient wages to meet basic needs. We made decisions that didn't support the needs of local housing developers or community members with rental property. We made decisions that facilitated moving housing into the hands of investors. We all own the consequences of these decisions and share accountability and responsibility for finding a path forward.³

Housing is a complex, multi-faceted and expensive issue. Over the last three decades Federal, state and local programs were developed to take on this challenge. Notably, there are in Vermont a vast number of local and community efforts as well that have targeted our housing needs and worked diligently to find solutions to the challenges we face. Despite these commendable efforts, the housing crisis is now acute and threatens the future of our state and the lives of thousands of our Vermont neighbors. As a recent report from the Vermont State Auditor concludes:

³The Rev. Deacon Beth Ann Maier, “Ending Emergency Rental Assistance,” Press Conference, Sept. 12, 2022

Vermont policymakers we spoke with in the course of this research used different words to ask similar questions: What will it take for Vermont to have the infrastructure in place, both services and housing, to “end homelessness”? Is there a target number of shelter beds? Of new permanent affordable units?

One year from now, Vermont will have exceeded half a billion in spending in seven years to address homelessness. While these investments benefited the many Vermonters who received shelter, services, financial support, and/or new housing, it is not clear that there is a unified vision of what a steady state system to address homelessness should look like. We recommend that the Executive and Legislative branches, working with organizations that work with homeless households, establish a definition of “success” so progress can be tracked. Homelessness is a complicated public problem, and the pandemic has added to the intensity of it. Nonetheless, without establishing measurable goals Vermont could easily continue on the current path without knowing whether the combined efforts described in this report have reduced the number of homeless Vermonters at any moment in time.⁴

This conclusion is in accord with the findings of the Vermont Interfaith Action Housing and Homelessness Organizing Committee that despite the efforts and funds spent toward the goal of ending homelessness the intensity of our housing crisis has increased. Part of the root of this problem is that there is not a single agency in Vermont government with the task of increasing housing and ending homelessness. These goals are split between a myriad of state agencies and programs. Without a comprehensive approach, the “unified vision” recommended in the Vermont State Auditor’s report is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.

⁴“Vermont’s Commitment to End Homelessness: Spending and Homeless Totals FY17 to FY22” Douglas R. Hoffer, Vermont State Auditor, July 28, 2022; Investigative Report 22-02. The report finds that, “We conclude that Vermont has spent more than \$455 million in the last six years. Annual spending jumped considerably in the heavily COVID-impacted FY21 and FY22 budgets.” Page 3.

VIA recommendations

Vermont Interfaith Action’s Affordable Housing and Homelessness Organizing Committee proposes a “6 Step Ladder” to lift every Vermonter who desires to be housed into safe, decent, and affordable housing.

STEP 1

Plan for an overall strategy in Vermont to shelter people now and move them into permanent housing.

Because the housing programs currently operating in Vermont are undertaken by several different agencies, the Agency for Human Services, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the Vermont Housing Finance Agency and the Vermont State Housing Authority, there is a great need for coordination of efforts and planning that involves listening to those who are directly affected by the housing crisis and those who work with them. We support the new Director of Housing Policy and Planning position to provide better coordination of efforts and a comprehensive plan. We also support listening sessions with community providers, but only if there is opportunity for true input into a planning process that emphasizes a long-term strategy.

STEP 2

Compile and base decisions on accurate data regarding both private housing stock and public housing options to keep the cost of housing (home ownership and rental) at 30% of the median income in a region, and the rental vacancy rate at 4% in each region.

There is a great and urgent need for accurate information about private housing stock and public housing options. Since 85% of the housing available to Vermonters comes through

the private market, efforts like VHIP (Vermont Housing Improvement Program) are useful, but a lack of coordination between the public and private options prevents a comprehensive set of affordable options for those seeking housing. Furthermore, the state could be doing more to assist municipalities with regulations that will provide incentives to private developers to build more affordable housing and to create developments that partner with not-for-profit developers. Also within this step we recommend that accurate data about the effects of unregulated short-term rental properties be taken into consideration to evaluate their impact on permanent housing.

STEP 3

Put in place a statewide rental registry and inspection system to make it easier to identify and sustain rentals that are affordable, safe and decent for all Vermonters.

This much-needed registry, to ensure that those seeking housing know what is available in the areas in which they want to live, has been on the priority list for all advocates of affordable housing for many years. It is time for the administration to work out any differences with the legislature on this measure and make it a reality.

STEP 4

Support and expand the “Housing First” model to ensure that those who need services can obtain them along with decent housing.

It is imperative that there is full funding for the supportive services needed by those who come into the housing first programs. While it will be an impossible goal to avoid a housing emergency for every single Vermonter, the goal should be to make these housing emergencies preventable (through enhanced eviction prevention programs), short term duration (with adequate and available temporary shelter services) and then a “one time only” event through

employing housing first and supportive services as needed and desired to make housing permanent.

STEP 5

Explore and quickly develop and implement innovative housing alternatives.

These housing alternatives include pods (currently under development in Burlington); pallet homes; tiny homes (already used successfully in a few Vermont communities); accessory dwelling units (or ADUs, currently under development in Brattleboro and suitable for many other localities), mobile homes, and modular homes. Also, there are some innovative ideas about converting existing state-owned structures that are no longer needed for their original purposes into housing, as well as converting motels to temporary or semi-permanent housing (models of this type of development already exist in Shelburne, operated by the Champlain Housing Trust, and in Central Vermont, operated by the Good Samaritan Haven).

STEP 6

Mitigate the number of evictions and increase housing retention through “just cause eviction” and “right to counsel” requirements.

Tenants need to have protections, once they find affordable rental housing, to be able to retain it. While landlords are due a reasonable rent to cover their costs, they should not be allowed to evict tenants simply to raise the rent and attract wealthier tenants. Tenants who are put in this or other difficult situations should be able to call upon legal representation and advisors to reach a fair settlement with their landlords.





A Vermont Guide to Community Engagement with Local Police Departments

April 6, 2022

Background

People of faith and good will have, with horror, watched scenes on the news of police across the country using excessive force on people of color, leading to death and serious injury, as well as trauma and humiliation. Leaders in Vermont Interfaith Action, following our community organizing model, have been conducting extensive research to understand what is needed for police in Vermont to treat all individuals in their jurisdictions equitably, with respect and dignity, and to provide true public safety to everyone.

The criteria below are meant as a guide for concerned groups in local communities to evaluate the organizational culture of their police departments and work with the leadership of these departments and the towns in which they are located to ensure that all persons whom they serve and with whom they interact are treated fairly and equitably.

The Case for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement

In December, 2013, the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing was established after police uses of force in Ferguson, MO; Cleveland, OH, and New York City and resulting protests across the United States. In May, 2015, the Task Force delivered a final report containing 156 recommendations and action items for law enforcement agencies and the federal government. These were organized within six “pillars”:

- 1. Building Trust and Legitimacy,
- 2. Policy and Oversight,
- 3. Technology and Media,
- 4. Community Policing and Crime Reduction,
- 5. Officer Training and Education, and
- 6. Officer Safety and Wellness.



As part of Building Trust and Legitimacy, the Final Report's recommendation 2.8 reads:

“Some form of civilian oversight of law enforcement is important in order to strengthen trust with the community. Every community should define the appropriate form and structure of civilian oversight to meet the needs of that community.”

Much of the literature and research on civilian oversight of law enforcement is focused on large municipalities (for example, the ACLU's manual on fighting police abuse¹). Often, the models described are not appropriate for the needs of Vermont communities, which are typically small and unlikely to have a budget for a separate elected or appointed Civilian Oversight Agency (COA). Some towns rely completely on the civilian oversight provided by officials who serve in other capacities as well, specifically Town or City Managers and Selectboards or City Councils.

While the leaders of some law enforcement departments welcome oversight efforts by bodies focused only on police, some do not. Whether a group is officially mandated or informally gathered from among community activists, it is important that the group's presence creates a form of accountability for the leaders of law enforcement departments. Jonathan A. Fox describes this as a combination of “voice” and “teeth”, where one is not effective in creating change without the other². Once both are present, however, studies have demonstrated that the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing was correct; COA's of differing types can reduce racial disparities and police violence over time³.

¹<https://www.aclu.org/other/fighting-police-abuse-community-action-manual>

²Fox, Jonathan A. “Social Accountability: What Does the Evidence Really Say?”, World Development Vol 72, pp 346-361, 2015. (retrieved from Elsevier: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305750X15000704?via%3Dihub>)

³See, for example, Ali, Mir and Pirog, Maureen, Social Accountability and Institutional Change: The Case of Citizen Oversight of Police (November 17, 2019). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3488575> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3488575>

The goal of this document is: 1) to provide a brief overview of the structure of how policing is conducted in Vermont and 2) to suggest a series of questions that can be used by a locally based community group to engage with their own municipal police force. Our vision is that local groups will use this resource to chart their own path in talking with, evaluating, and holding accountable the police who serve them in their own local settings.

All the information in this document is the result of ongoing research, so this should be considered a work in progress. Our research so far has consisted of face-to-face interviews and discussions with Vermont State Police; the Police Chiefs of Burlington, South Burlington, Winooski, and Williston; the Team Lead of the Burlington Outreach program; the Executive Director of the NAACP Windham branch; the Defender General member of the Racial Disparities Advisory Panel; the Executive Director of the Vermont Racial Justice Alliance; a member of the Vermont Racial Equity Panel, the Executive Director of the Vermont Criminal Justice Council, the Commissioner of Vermont's Department of Public Safety, and several Vermont state legislators.

Brief overview of policing in Vermont

These types of entities comprise Vermont's policing services:

1. **Vermont State Police**
2. **Municipal police forces**
3. **County Sheriffs**
4. **Specialty services, like University or Campus police**

All “sworn officers” who work in each of these kinds of forces are required to complete basic training at the Vermont Police Academy located in Pittsford, Vermont. Some forces, such as the Vermont State Police, require additional training at the Academy as well, and many forces

conduct periodic in-house trainings on different subjects throughout the year.

In addition to their initial training, sworn officers must also complete a minimum of 30 hours annually. Within those 30 hours are trainings on First Aid/CPR, Firearms Certification, Use of Force including De-Escalation techniques, and Hazmat. There are also mandated bi-annual trainings in the areas of Domestic Violence response and Fair and Impartial Policing.

Some forces have access to social workers to assist with calls that feature mental health or substance use disorder issues, and a few have outreach workers embedded in their force. The idea is for the social workers to help police compassionately de-escalate the situation and refer those involved to the appropriate state and community providers for further assistance.

Local police chiefs generally answer to a town's Mayor or City Manager with additional review and input from the City Council or Selectboard. The Vermont State Police answer to the Commissioner of Public Safety at the state level. Sheriffs operate at the county level and can perform duties for municipalities. What sheriffs do varies greatly by region in Vermont. In some places, like Chittenden County, sheriffs transport those awaiting trial between detention centers and court, and they monitor road construction and repair sites. In other parts of the state, sheriffs investigate crimes and enforce laws in lieu of municipal police forces.

An important part of Vermont's law enforcement structure is the presence of 14 Community Justice Centers (CJCs) throughout the state. These CJCs are run by paid staff with volunteer community members serving on panels that review low level criminal incidents. The goal is to divert those with first offenses, who are young, and/or who have committed misdemeanors, from the criminal court and prison system into one that employs restorative justice practices. These practices sometimes result in bringing the offender together in a controlled setting with those they have harmed in order to understand the impact of their actions. Even where this interaction does not occur, the CJC process helps the offender accept responsibility for the pain they have caused, and accept consequences decided upon jointly by themselves and community members. These consequences are drawn up in a contract that the

responsible party agrees to fulfill, and the CJC works with the responsible party to ensure that they remain fully engaged in accountability and repair.

Police forces in Vermont are usually encouraged by state's attorneys at the county level to divert cases to CJCs whenever they can and still preserve public safety.

Informal evaluation

This guide is intended to focus not on the entirety of the law enforcement or criminal justice system, but to concentrate specifically on policing. Through our own experience, VIA leaders have come to identify the following elements as those that contribute to creating a respectful organizational culture toward all persons.

Our research suggests one of the most important determinants of this culture is *leadership*. Therefore, we strongly recommend that to obtain the answers to the questions below, local community members meet face-to-face in a small group with the Police Chief, to foster a conversational exchange.

These are not meant to be an exhaustive list of criteria by which to rate any municipal police force; instead, they are intended to be *a first step in opening up dialogue between the police and concerned members of the community they serve*.

1. AWARENESS OF EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT BIAS

- What has the department done to ensure that officers understand the difference between explicit and implicit bias?
- What tools have officers been given to become more aware of their own personal implicit biases and mitigate against them when dealing with the public?

2. TRAINING IN DE-ESCALATION PRACTICES

- Besides the basic training at the Vermont Police Academy, what additional training have officers received in de-escalating potentially volatile situations? Have all officers received training in de-escalation tactics?
- Is periodic retraining expected or required?
- What alternate methods of dealing with uncooperative individuals, not including the use of force, have officers been trained in?

3. PERFORMANCE EXPECTATIONS

- How do supervisors establish and reinforce performance expectations?
- How do supervisors assure that all persons with whom officers come in contact are treated with respect and dignity?
- Is there a clear message that violent tactics, violent language, and disrespectful attitudes are not appropriate and will not be tolerated?
- Have policies been changed to help officers avoid situations in which unacceptable behaviors might occur – e.g., mailing a ticket to instead of stopping a driver whose taillight is broken?

4. OFFICER PERFORMANCE REVIEW

- Does the Chief review and evaluate officer performance on a regular basis (at least annually)?
- What are the tools and processes used for performance review?
- Is performance information solicited from parties outside the police dept?

- Does the Chief examine department activity data (such as traffic stops, arrests, complaints, use of force incidents) down to the individual officer level to probe for performance concerns?
- How are performance deficiencies and training needs handled?
- How often are officers given routine evaluations of the performance of their duties and their general conduct? What methodology is used in these evaluations? Is there an attempt to collect feedback from community members?

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

- How can complaints against specific officers be submitted by a member of the public?
- What is the process of investigation of complaints?
- Is there any provision for independent investigation?
- What response is provided to the complainant?
- Does the Chief have a process to record and track troublesome performance? Who decides the consequences for unacceptable behavior and/or a repeated pattern of such behavior?
- What are those consequences, and are they clear and consistent?
- Is there a possibility for meaningful citizen input regarding the consequences?

6. DATA COLLECTION

- Does the department collect and record data on all key department activities (e.g. traffic stops, searches, arrests, uses of force)?
- Is the data reviewed regularly for accuracy and quality?

- Is the data analyzed and compiled in a published report at least annually?
- Is the data used to probe for potential concerns such as racial bias, gender bias, excessive use of force, or over policing?
- Does the department collect traffic stop data, arrest data, and other information about incidents? If so, what kind of methodology do they employ? How is this data recorded and accumulated? Can it be disaggregated by race?

7. DATA ANALYSIS

- Does someone who is well-versed in understanding the implications of such data help in interpreting it for the department?
- Does the Chief share both the data and the interpretations with the officers, town leadership, and the general public?

8. HIRING/DISCIPLINE/FIRING POLICIES

- Is the department seeking to recruit people of color as officers and other staff? What methods does the department use to advertise and recruit for staff openings?
- What behaviors trigger a disciplinary action?
- Is violation of de-escalation policies or demonstration of bias an offense that one can be fired for?

9. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- Are there ways for civilians to weigh in on interpreting traffic stop, arrest, and other data? What are these ways?
- Do civilians have the opportunity to provide substantive input rather than superficial interactions with officers or the chief? Does the Town or City have a Police Commission?

10. MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- Have officers received any training in understanding serious mental illness? Is there an outreach worker from a local designated agency or specialized service agency that police can call on when a situation necessitates it?
- Is there a more formal embed system?
- Is the funding for this adequate and sustainable?

11. SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS (SUDS)

- Is there an outreach worker for assistance with individuals who have SUDs, especially those who chronically have interactions with the police because of their SUD?
- Are there clear steps outlined to get the individual the assistance they need?

Willingness to acknowledge challenges the police face

We understand from our research that although our policing system is broken in many ways, which lays open the possibility that inequities will and do occur frequently, there are nonetheless police officers who sincerely seek to understand their own bias and who try to do the best for their communities. We have heard that often the challenges of the job also create personal trauma for the police officers as well. To build a rapport and a relationship with the police, we recommend asking some questions about this aspect of their work as well.

1. POSITIVE STORIES

- Are there stories of officers on the job assisting community members in a positive way that you would like to share with us?
- Are there particular officers whose behavior and performance you think have been exemplary that you want to highlight?
- Are there examples of times when an incident could have taken a turn for the worse where an officer's good conduct led to a much better outcome?
- In what ways does the department support officers' well-being or promote a culture where self-care is valued?

2. CHALLENGES OF POLICE WORK

- Are there stories of a particularly difficult and/or dangerous situation that you'd like to share with us so that we get a sense of what an officer might face on a day-to-day basis?
- How would you describe the effects of this job over time on the emotional and physical well-being of an officer?
- What consequences does this job have for the families and friends of the officers as they seek to manage its demands?
- What outright trauma have any of your officers experienced?

3. MOTIVATIONS FOR THE WORK

- How would you describe the most prevalent reasons that officers decide to get into police work in the first place?
- What do you think keeps officers in the work?

- How have you seen individual officers grow and mature in their understanding of their communities?
- How have you seen officers improve in their impact on their communities?

Beginning the Work

After this initial research, it is possible that there will be areas of concern. Depending on the context and the extent of the problems, a citizen oversight effort might want to work more closely with the Police Chief or may feel compelled to address these concerns at the city governance level (Selectboard, Town Manager, etc).

In either case, there is the question of how to be the "voice" – that is, clearly signaling the need for oversight, and the "teeth" – the path by which oversight results in change. Moving forward, your group might want to consider some of the following questions:

1. If we have concerns based on this research, how do we make them known? Are the problems serious enough to get the press involved, to organize rallies or protests, or to go to Town leadership? ("voice")
2. How do we get the Chief and other leaders to address any problems we see right now? What sorts of structures need to be put in place to create meaningful change and who has the authority to establish those? ("teeth")
3. How do we set up monitoring of conditions or data over time?
4. Do we want to be an ad hoc group of community members or do we want to seek more formal recognition by the Selectboard, Town Manager, or Police Chief?
5. Are there problems better solved through relationship-building between the police and community members, and/or through forums with town neighborhoods or groups?

Resources

- Executive Summary of Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing
- *The President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing Implementation Guide: Moving from Recommendations to Action* (Washington, DC, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, US DOJ, 2015)
- *State and Local Spending on Public Safety, Report to the Governor and the General Assembly*, Douglas R. Hoffer, Vermont State Auditor, 2017
- Vermont ACLU Action Plan to Reimagine Public Safety (2020). Signees include:
 - Justice for All, Migrant Justice, Outright Vermont, Pride Center of Vermont, Rights and Democracy, VT Branches of the NAACP, VT Businesses for Social Responsibility, VT Center for Independent Living, Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform, VT Human Rights Commission, Vermont Legal Aid, Vermont Public Interest Research Group, Women's Justice and Freedom Initiative
- *Sensible Alternatives to Fatal Escalation (S.A.F.E) Policing Plan*, Brattleboro Community Safety Review Committee, 2019
- *Trends in Racial Disparities in Vermont Traffic Stops, 2014-19*, Stephanie Seguino and Nancy Brooks, Jan/2021.
- *Law Enforcement Modernization in Vermont, A Partial Roadmap and Commitment by Law Enforcement Agencies to Work with Our Communities* (draft update 8/12/20), Dept of Public Safety, Office of the VT Attorney General, VT Association of Chiefs of Police, VT Criminal Justice Training Council, and the VT Sheriff's Association
- Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council Fair and Impartial Policing Policy, 12/7/17

- The Winooski Police Department and 21st Century Policing, Chief Rick Hebert, 7/28/20
- Winooski Police Department Community Policing Strategic Plan, FY 2019-21

Websites

- NACOLE website (<https://www.nacole.org/>)
- CAHOOTS (a coordinated response team for mental health crises working with law enforcement in Eugene, OR. (<https://whitebirdclinic.org/cahoots/>))
- VT State Police (<https://vsp.vermont.gov/>)
- Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems Advisory Panel (R-DAP) (<https://www.orcamedia.net/series/racial-disparities-advisory-panel>)
- VT Racial Justice Alliance (<https://www.vtracialjusticealliance.org/>)
- NAACP chapters in Rutland (<https://naacprutland.org/>) and Windham (<https://windhamnaacp.org/>) counties
- Criminal Justice Centers in Vermont (<http://cjnvt.org>)





Declaration of Inclusion

An Important Racial Justice Initiative for Your Town in Vermont

Vermont Interfaith Action stands in full support of and is proud to champion the Declaration of Inclusion for all towns across the state of Vermont.

As people of faith, we know you are committed to building more inclusive and welcoming communities. Members of VIA's Racial Justice organizing group want to let you know about *an important initiative* that we believe will help our towns and cities more fully embody those values in all their public work. We invite you to encourage your local leadership to get involved with Vermont's **Declaration of Inclusion**.

The Declaration of Inclusion

The Declaration of Inclusion is a powerful statement that every Vermont municipality is invited to affirm and use to focus greater attention on becoming more welcoming in every activity carried out by municipal government. The intent of the Declaration of Inclusion is "to indicate and reinforce the message to all visitors, residents, and those thinking about or planning to come and stay, that:

- Vermont is a welcoming community.
- Vermont invites all to bring their families and friends, as well as their talents and skills.
- Vermont is a community of people who will treat them fairly, provide encouragement and support for their interests.
- Vermont will bring the full resources of the state, cities, and towns to ensure their well-being and security."

(from the Declaration's website)



At this point, 87 of Vermont’s 246 towns and cities, representing 57.8% of Vermont’s population, have adopted the Declaration (or their own version of it), committing to its goals and to finding ways to become more welcoming. We invite you to check the Declaration’s website (www.vtdeclarationofinclusion.org) to see if your town is one of them. If it is, we encourage you to find out what your municipality is doing to embody the Declaration. If it isn’t, we invite you to encourage your elected leadership to get on board. The Declaration's website has a great deal of information about how to do that.

Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) is in full support of this initiative. We would be happy to provide you with more information about how to get your community involved. Contact us at www.viavt.org.

Declaration of Inclusion

Town of _____, Vermont

The Town of _____ condemns racism and welcomes all persons, regardless of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity or expression, age, disability, or socioeconomic status, and wants everyone to feel safe and welcome in our community.

As a town, we formally condemn all discrimination in all of its forms, commit to fair and equal treatment of everyone in our community, and will strive to ensure all of our actions, policies, and operating procedures reflect this commitment.

The Town of _____ has and will continue to be a place where individuals can live freely and express their opinions.

By the _____ Selectboard on _____, 20__.





A Vision of a Moral Economy

Update, January 2023

The Clergy and Elder Caucus of Vermont Interfaith Action has resolved to speak out on issues that affect our state through the principles of a Moral Economy. Reasonable people can disagree in good faith about policies, but these are the principles upon which our policy choices are grounded. We agree that our current culture and economy does not mirror these tenets, and hear our various faiths call us toward a culture and economy that more closely reflects these principles.

A moral economy honors the dignity of all people.

But in the days to come, the mountain of the LORD's house will be the highest of the mountains; it will be lifted above the hills; peoples will stream to it. Many nations will go and say: "Come, let's go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of Jacob's God, so that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in God's paths!" Instruction will come from Zion and the LORD's word from Jerusalem. God will judge between the nations and settle disputes of mighty nations, which are far away.

They will beat their swords into iron plows and their spears into pruning tools. Nation will not take up sword against nation; they will no longer learn how to make war. All will sit underneath their own grapevines, under their own fig trees. There will be no one to terrify them; for the mouth of the LORD of heavenly forces has spoken.

— Micah 4:1-4



The following pages are organized in Talmudic form, in which the center of the page contains the central thought and commentary on that text encircles the center going outwards toward the margins. This is intended to be a living document, with changes to commentary as appropriate over time, and thus it contains space for future additions. However, we believe that the central principles included herein transcend news cycles, cultural norms, and changing economic theories.

In addition, each page includes past and ongoing VIA initiatives that we believe embody these principles.

We believe that communities yearn for peace, and that our culture and economy should help create and sustain peace. As Martin Luther King, Jr described, a true peace is founded upon the belief in the “sacredness of human personality” and can only come about when all people “respect the dignity and human worth of personality.” Just laws and just policies are those that uphold the worth of human personality.

We believe that a moral economy honors the dignity of all people.



Across religions, we hear a call for **respect for the dignity of all**, from the Hebrew call to respect the rights of the strangers among us to the Christian reminder that all have been given gifts by God to the Quran’s directive to show hospitality to all without regard for circumstance, including the needy, the widowed, and the captive.

We believe that a moral economy values the contributions of all of its members, and invites all members to participate.

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same

Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do. The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others.

– 1 Corinthians 12:4-7



Everybody has the power for greatness, not for fame, but for greatness, because greatness is determined by service.

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr



A moral economy values every person’s gifts and abilities.

And they give food in spite of love for it to the needy, the orphan, and the captive, [Saying], ‘We feed you only for the countenance of Allah. We wish not from you reward or gratitude.’

– Surah 76:8-9

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.

– Deuteronomy 10:17-19

Through the work of Local Organizing Committees (LOC’s) made up of people from 5 different congregations, VIA has been promoting the principle of full economic inclusion for all. This has included initiatives around legislation to encourage home ownership and business supports for BIPOC individuals as well as working with local city and town leaders to adopt Vermont’s Declaration of Inclusion.



A society that demands citizens work for wages that do not provide for basic sustenance in that society is immoral.

“In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression – everywhere in the world. The second is freedoms of every person to worship god in his own way – everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want ... everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear ... anywhere in the world.

– Franklin D. Roosevelt

Look, the pay you have held back from the workers who mowed your fields cries out against you, and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.

– James 6:4

A moral economy offers all people just rewards and fair wages for their work.

One of the most basic tenets of economic justice is **fair wage for fair work**. While reasonable people can differ on specifics about what constitutes a fair wage, we believe that at a minimum, a fair wage includes provision for and adequate standard of living for a worker and her dependents, including:

- Food
- Clothing
- Shelter
- Physical Safety
- Basic health care, including care for mental illness
- Security from fear of food scarcity

Give full measure and be not among those who cause loss; and weigh with a true balance, and do not deprive people of what is rightfully theirs.

– Surah 26:181-183

For we know now that it isn't enough to integrate lunch counters. What does it profit a man to be able to eat at an integrated lunch counter if he doesn't have enough money to buy a hamburger?

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr

For years, VIA has been a strong advocate for increasing the state's minimum wage. However, the fairness of a wage presumes that it allows workers to have basic necessities. For many in Vermont, housing has become unaffordable. In 2022, an LOC including 7 congregations helped encourage legislators to allocate \$300 million for new housing units. This group continues to advocate for oversight of this effort and improved housing availability in their paper, "Six Steps to Solve the Crisis" and through the "Housing For All" coalition (working with Vermont Legal Aid and Rights and Democracy).

Woe to him who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his upper rooms by injustice; who makes his neighbors work for nothing, and does not give them their wages.

– Jeremiah 22:13

I'm 34 years old, I have two bachelor's degrees, and I still need at this point to work multiple different positions to just pay for my basic living expenses. Every month, I have to make difficult decisions about which utilities I'm going to allow to lapse.

– Elaine, VIA speaker



We believe that our faith traditions call us to **honor and respect the dignity of all who cannot work**, either because of physical or mental disability or because our societal structures do not allow full employment.

Economic systems and tools are imperfect instruments, benefitting some and leaving others out. **A moral economy provides for the well-being and dignity of those being left out.**



It's a human life crisis that needs to be averted ... these things are not going away.

– John, VIA speaker

A moral economy respects and provides for all who are unable to work.

Those who are unable to work must still have their basic needs met. In addition, a moral economy provides paths to **full opportunity and inclusion**, including:

- Education
- Job Creation
- Recreation

Our faith lines remind us that greed is among the most destructive of human errors, and our traditions provide many different ways of caring for those being left behind. We do not believe that societal neglect of those unable to work is moral; we believe this to be immoral.

If there is a poor person among you, one of your brothers within any of your gates in the land the Lord your God is giving you, you must not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward your poor brother. Instead, you are to open your hand to him and freely loan him enough for whatever need he has. Be careful that there isn't this wicked thought in your heart, 'The seventh year, the year of canceling debts, is near,' and you are stingy toward your poor brother and give him nothing. He will cry out to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty. Give to him, and don't have a stingy heart when you give, and because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you do. For there will never cease to be poor people in the land; that is why I am commanding you, 'You must willingly open your hand to your afflicted and poor brother in your land.'

– Deuteronomy 15:7-11

Change is possible when we stop seeing others as needy and start seeing each other as necessary.

– Rev. Traci Blackmon

In addition to the LOC working to end homelessness, another LOC made up of 5 congregations has been working to create and promote reforms in our Corrections and Rehabilitation systems. This includes everything from improving conditions of incarceration to providing job training to improving the work conditions and compensation for corrections officers, which we believe will improve conditions for everyone.



We believe that all **children** should be given a good education, healthcare (including preventative care), time with their family, and safety (including safety from want). We believe that **single mothers** warrant special consideration, as do **seniors**. We believe that those who are **differently abled** deserve special considerations, and we believe that we are called to care for our **veterans**, especially those who have suffered physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual injury. Those experiencing **mental illness** should be healed, not stigmatized

The measure of a civilization is how it treats its weakest members.
– Various

Right here in Vermont, there are families being separated through the awful practice of deportation.

The wrongness, the overt cruelty of this racist, evil immigration “system”, I can’t fully put into words. But the embodied experience of how intensely I love my children has cracked my heart open, shaken me to my core.

– Grace, VIA speaker

A moral economy respects and protects the most vulnerable.

Our faith reminds us that **human beings are of inestimable worth**, not because of their contribution to this year’s GDP, but because they are human beings.

In our faith traditions, we hear a divine call to lift up the dignity of all of our brothers and sisters, without regard to the ways economic systems value (or devalue) their worth. **As people of faith, we hear a special call to care for those who are the most vulnerable to the vicissitudes of economic theories, policies, and fates.**

It took me months to get into see a mental health worker ... as you already know, 95% of the women in prison are affected by trauma.

– Amber, describing her experience of incarceration

As part of a national body (Faith in Action), VIA has been working to advocate for those who immigrate to our country and our state. In addition to working to support both Dreamers and humane immigration reform at the federal level, VIA is working at the local level to understand the ways in which local law enforcement agencies are participating in helping target immigrants at home, work, or in community sites and understanding how concerned community members can hold these agencies accountable.

Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me.’

Then those who are righteous will reply to him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you a drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or naked and give you clothes to wear? When did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’

Then the king will reply to them, ‘I assure you that when you have done it for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you have done it for me.’

– Matthew 25:34-40



While racial disparities exist in virtually every facet of American society, they are most glaring in issues regarding **enforcement, judicial, and corrections systems**.

Beginning with school discipline and progressing through traffic stops, arrests, convictions, and sentencing, **racial disparities are prevalent**. Compared to white Americans, Black Americans are far more likely to be killed by law enforcement, exonerated from wrongful convictions, sentenced to death, and incarcerated.

As people of faith, we hear the call to **true justice**—a justice that doesn't operate on different sets of rules for different people, but which sees all people as worthy of **equal protection** under the law, and which holds those responsible for public safety **accountable**.

We believe that the principle aim of any economy is the well-being of all of its people, and **personal safety** is at the core of one's well-being. Likewise, justice is only justice when it applies to everyone equally and everyone knows that they will be treated justly.

Unfortunately, our current society does not treat everyone fairly; this is especially apparent in **racial disparities**.

“One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of “not racist.” The claim of “not racist” neutrality is a mask for racism.

– Ibram X. Kendi

A moral economy ensures the safety of all members of that economy equally.

“A democracy cannot thrive where power remains unchecked and justice is reserved for a select few. Ignoring these cries and failing to respond to this movement is simply not an option — for peace cannot exist where justice is not served.

– John Lewis

The criminal justice system's problems with racism start before the first contact and continue through pleas, conviction, incarceration, and release.

– American Bar Association

You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.
– Deuteronomy 16:19

An LOC with members from 5 congregations has been researching public safety issues in Vermont for the past three years, interviewing legislators, police chiefs, professors, and policy makers. This research led to a field guide for community groups to work in supporting racial justice in law enforcement called, “Vermont Guide to Community Engagement with Local Police Departments.”

In addition, VIA conducted a campaign throughout the state to successfully support Proposal 2, which abolished slavery in Vermont's constitution.





Praise be to you, my Lord, through our Sister, Mother Earth, who sustains and governs us, and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs”

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her.

– Pope Francis

A moral economy respects the earth and its resources, preserving life for future generations.

Allah’s Messenger said, ‘There is none amongst the Muslims who plants a tree or sows seeds, and then a bird, or a person or an animal eats from it, but is regarded as a charitable gift for him.’
– Sahih al-Bukhari 41:1

What we do to earth community, we do to ourselves.



– Sylvia, VIA Speaker



We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one destiny, affects all indirectly.

– Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.





Vermont Interfaith Action (VIA) is a federation of over 70 member and affiliated congregations, representing some 16,000 Vermonters. We use a community organizing methodology to effect systemic change around issues of social justice. VIA is an affiliate of the Faith in Action national network.

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Vermont Interfaith Action
Transforming People and Communities

