



MEMORANDUM

To: House Committee on Human Services
From: Sarah Russell, Special Assistant to End Homelessness, City of Burlington and
Co-chair, Chittenden County Homeless Alliance
Date: 1/9/2024
Re: Update on the implementation of H.171 in Chittenden County related to the public hearing on the supplemental budget adjustment.

This testimony provides an update on the Chittenden County region-wide efforts to connect households within the state's pandemic-era motel program with permanent housing opportunities, as well as an update on known unsheltered populations and shelter capacity within the City of Burlington and the region. Since June 1, 2023, we have connected 185 households to permanent housing and 116 households from the June cohort remain in motel shelter. More than 250 individuals continue to live without shelter in the Burlington area, while we maintain 349 emergency shelter beds.

As a result of the ending of the State's Emergency Shelter Program, Burlington and Chittenden County has experienced a more than 500% increase in the unsheltered population over the last year, from approximately 40 in January 2023 to over 250 today.

The number of people living unsheltered right now is unacceptable and far more than we have ever witnessed in the county. While maintaining accurate data of unsheltered populations remains a challenge, we do have information from outreach teams that articulates this rapid and dramatic increase in unsheltered homelessness following the June 1 ESD motel exists:

- In summer of 2022, Chittenden County outreach teams comprised of services providers representing eight community organizations reported engaging with approximately 80 unsheltered individuals.¹
- The January 2023 point-in-time count recorded 43 individuals living unsheltered in the County.
- Self-reports of unsheltered homelessness at the Community Resource Center in Burlington (co-located with Feeding Chittenden) has increased from 100 self-reports in March 2023 to a high of 252 in November.

This increase is shocking, considering that since the onset of the pandemic Chittenden County has doubled its shelter capacity from 149 emergency shelter beds to 349 today, with the great majority of new emergency shelter beds at Burlington's two new low-barrier facilities at Elmwood

¹ CORA and CE Outreach (CVOEO); COTS Motel Outreach; Burlington, Essex, Colchester Police Depts.; Spectrum; Safe Harbor PATH; Urban Park Rangers; Howard Center Street and Community Outreach
City Hall | 149 Church Street | Burlington, VT 05401
802.865.7272 | www.burlingtonvt.gov

Emergency Shelter Community (currently operated by CHT) and the Champlain Inn (currently operated by CVOEO). Approximately 90% of all emergency shelter in the County is located within the City of Burlington.

Furthermore, in response to the significant number of people living unsheltered, the City opened the Burlington Temporary Overnight Warming Shelter on December 15. This low-barrier shelter has successfully accommodated a minimum of 30 guests each evening and since opening has served over **100²** total individuals in less than one month of operating, demonstrating the critical need for emergency shelter in our community. Staff report turning away 4-8 individuals each night due to lack of capacity.

Implementation of H.171 through Chittenden County Coordinate Entry has continued since the City of Burlington and CCHA first submitted LOI's in June 2023ⁱ.

Following the passage of H.171 and on July 30, 2023, Chittenden County motels housed 256 households- which became known as the June cohort. At that time, approximately 90 of these households were not enrolled in Coordinated Entry (CE). Outreach teams from Community Health Centers, Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity, Committee on Temporary Shelter, and Burlington Police Department have since worked in close collaboration, and now all June cohort members have been enrolled in CE. We are on pace with our projected rate of housing placement of 20-25 households per month from the June cohort, and anticipate all households in this cohort will be connected to permanent housing by July 1, 2024:

- Between June 1 and December 1, the Chittenden County Coordinated Entry system has assisted 185 households with identifying permanent housing placement, approximately 135 have been from the June cohort.
- Additionally, preliminary data from December shows another 17 housing placements.
- As of January 9, ESD reports 116 households from the June cohort remained in motel shelter.
- Bi-weekly case consultation has continued for June cohort households to ensure they are progressing toward permanent housing.
- Approximately 740 households total are in CE currently; this represents 1 in 100 households in Chittenden County, which is unprecedented.

As we work to implement H.171, several serious challenges persist, including:

- Lack of capacity among service providers: our social service agencies continue to be exhausted by the level of need they respond to in the community and report lack of capacity, staffing, and ability to expand and/or grow new programs at this time.
- Extensive wait times for case management: the wait time is currently **12 weeks** between CE enrollments and the initial meeting with a housing case manager.
- Lack of permanent housing for households to transition to and mismatch of rental assistance resources. When housing units become available, CE is generally able to connect people to permanent housing quickly and effectively.

² When this testimony was first given on 1/9 the warming shelter had served 70 individuals. As of 1/17 it has served over 100 individuals.

Conclusion

It is essential that motel stays for the households in the June 1 cohort continue until the Coordinated Entry system can successfully connect these vulnerable populations with appropriate housing, and that investments in new shelter be prioritized for the hundreds of Vermonters currently suffering without shelter and with inadequate access to social and public health services from our overstretched community organizations. To effectively address the continuing challenges in the implementation of H.171, we must expand the partnership and collaboration between municipalities, service and housing providers, and state agencies.

The City of Burlington and the CCHA believe that homelessness is solvable – and that we all have accountability in solving it.

Background: the Chittenden County Homeless Alliance

The Chittenden County Homeless Alliance (CCHA), comprised of nearly 30 representatives is our local Continuum of Care and local decision-making body for allocation of HUD funding, policy development, and systems-level work. In addition to the Steering Committee which meets once per month, we have a number of sub-committees that focus on and tackle specific strategies including Coordinated Entry, Strategic Planning, NOFO and Ranking (which reviews the annual HUD release of funding opportunities, prepares and ranks collaborative application on behalf of the Continuum), Outreach and Membership, and Data Quality sub-committees. All committee and sub-committee meetings are open to the public and we especially encourage people with lived experience of homelessness or housing insecurity to participate and provide feedback on systems improvement.

Background: City of Burlington Housing and Homelessness Initiatives

The City of Burlington has long supported initiatives to address Vermont's housing crisis and support unsheltered homelessness. In December 2021, Mayor Weinberger announced a 10-point Action Plan to Fulfill the Promise of Housing as Human Right.³ Among those initiatives was the creation the Special Assistant to End Homelessness within the Administration to be accountable for the City's policies and programs that address homelessness. Since 2021, the Administration has made progress on all 10 initiatives which include a goal to double the rate of housing development, strategies to increase housing availability including through re-zoning, investments to strengthen Coordinated Entry, \$5 million of directed ARPA spending for housing and homelessness initiatives, the creation of new low-barrier shelter with a public health approach, and increased funding to our Housing Trust Fund for the creation of permanently affordable units – which is now up 400%⁴.

¹ City of Burlington June LOI:

<https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/sites/default/files/City%20of%20Burlington%20LOI%20FINAL.pdf> and the CCHA June LOI: <https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/sites/default/files/CCHA%20-%20AHS%20LOI%2006-09-2023.pdf>

³ Mayor Weinberger's 10-Point Action Plan to Fulfill the Promise of Housing as a Human Right:

<https://www.burlingtonvt.gov/sites/default/files/Mayor%20Miro%20Weinberger%E2%80%99s%202021%20Action%20Plan%20to%20Fulfill%20the%20Promise%20of%20Housing%20as%20a%20Human%20Right%20in%20Burlington.pdf>

⁴ The City of Burlington tracks and shares data to support these initiatives, it is available on the BTV Stat Data hub: <https://data.burlingtonvt.gov/pages/housing>