
Report to
The Vermont General Assembly

Development of Emergency Shelter and Permanent Supportive Housing Capacity

Act 113 of 2024 (H.883)

Submitted to: Joint Fiscal Committee
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Department for Children and Families
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Legislative Charge

This report is submitted in accordance with Act 113 of 2024 Sec. E321.1(b)(2) and in fulfillment of the requirement for the Department for Children and Families (DCF) to submit a report by July 15, 2024 to the Joint Fiscal Committee on the plan to continue to develop emergency shelters for the provision of lodging between December 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025 to households that do not meet the eligibility criteria for General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing. Per Act 113:

“The Department shall continue to develop emergency shelters for the provision of lodging between December 1, 2024 and March 31, 2025 to households that do not meet the eligibility criteria ... or are otherwise in need of emergency shelter.”

“In fiscal year 2025, \$10,000,000 allocated from the General Fund in Sec. B 1102(b)(9) of this act to expand shelter bed and permanent supportive housing shall be used by the Department to first develop emergency shelters as required in subsection (a) of this section. Any allocated funds that are not needed for emergency shelters may be used to expand permanent shelter bed and permanent supportive housing capacity.”

Executive Summary

The General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing program administered by the Department for Children and Families (DCF) provides shelter to eligible households experiencing homelessness. During State fiscal year 2025, pursuant to Act 113, Sec. E.321, emergency winter housing through the General Assistance Emergency Housing program is available to households meeting the eligibility criteria. DCF is continuing to develop community-based emergency shelter capacity. DCF issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity to continue the development of such emergency shelters on May 31, 2024, and as of July 10 had received fourteen applications totaling \$34,925,732. DCF is currently reviewing applications and anticipates issuing awards on a rolling basis. DCF will closely monitor progress and provide updates to the Joint Fiscal Committee by September 1, and November 1, 2024.

Background

Vermont is a “shelter first” state. The General Assistance (GA) Emergency Housing program administered by DCF provides shelter to eligible households experiencing homelessness if there is not capacity in community emergency shelters. This includes providing emergency winter housing to households meeting the eligibility criteria. Pursuant to Act 113, Sec. E.321, the fiscal year 2025 program includes new eligibility, hotel room caps, and new length of stay limitations. During cold weather months, only

categorically eligible households may access the GA Emergency Housing Program. This is a change from prior years when any household, without demonstration of need, could access GA shelter.

Pursuant to Act 113, as of July 1, 2024, households with a member who meets one of the following eligibility criteria are offered emergency housing assistance in a motel/hotel:

- Age 65+
- Has a disability (SSI, SSDI, Medical Variance form)
- Child(ren) age 19 and under
- Pregnant
- Has experienced the death of a spouse, domestic partner, minor child that caused the housing loss
- Has experienced a natural disaster that caused the housing loss
- Court ordered or constructive eviction (no fault of the household)
- Experienced domestic or similar dangerous violence that caused the housing loss

When Adverse Weather Conditions ended in April 2024, there were 348 households not categorically eligible. Seventy-five percent of these households were from the Barre, Bennington, Brattleboro, Burlington, and Rutland Districts.

Under Act 113, DCF is charged with continuing to develop shelter capacity during this period. Over the past year, emergency shelter capacity has increased. In September 2023, the state-funded emergency shelter household capacity totaled 436. As of today, there is capacity for 534 households. Capacity will continue to grow in the year ahead. State fiscal year 2025 Housing Opportunity Grant Program awards include funding to increase shelter household capacity up to 630 during the year.¹ The goal is to further increase emergency shelter capacity, especially during cold weather months and in high volume communities.

¹ This includes a 40 household capacity project that is still in early stages of development. DCF and the provider are in close communication and will know in early fall if this project is feasible.

Approach

At the close of the fiscal year 2024 Adverse Weather Conditions period, in March 2024, it was clear that while the State can operationalize short-term, temporary emergency shelters, there is a better way to assist Vermonters. Moreover, the process of rapidly developing and standing-up such temporary shelters demonstrated how vitally important the partnership is among municipalities, providers, and the State.

Vermont has a network of shelter providers, engaged community organizations, and strong cities and towns familiar with their local housing needs and well-positioned to address them. DCF supports the development of local, customized solutions to the housing and homelessness challenges faced by each community. In Act 113, the General Assembly established an ambitious and tight timeline for implementation of this program, understanding the need and urgency. Consequently, the Department has moved quickly to implement the program, in order to give maximum time for applicants/recipients. The State, cities and towns, and providers must all work together in order to ensure projects can be operational by this winter.

On May 31, 2024, just 8 days after the bill was signed into law, DCF issued a Notice of Funding Opportunity to expand emergency shelter² and permanent supportive housing capacity across Vermont, reaching out to providers and municipal partners to invite projects that brought all parties to the same table. In addition to the public release the Notice was also specifically distributed to the Chittenden County Homelessness Alliance and the Housing and Homelessness Alliance of Vermont, the League of Cities & Towns, the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, Vermont Housing Finance Agency, Agency of Human Services Field Services Directors, and more. DCF's Office of Economic Opportunity hosted an online overview of the Notice on June 4, 2024, and office hours on June 13, 2024, and July 2, 2024. Because of the need to have projects operational within six months of release of the Notice, applications were due July 10, 2024 in order to comply with the intent of the legislation to create as much new shelter capacity by December 2024.

The Agency of Human Services (AHS) and DCF leadership also met with key municipalities throughout the month of June to discuss the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program in State fiscal year 2025, how it may impact each community, and to ensure communities were aware of the Notice and had an opportunity to have questions answered.

² Emergency shelters will operate according to the Housing Opportunity Grant Program Standards & Guidance.

Summary of Applications

In total, DCF received fourteen applications totaling \$34,925,732. The applications represent communities in seven counties. Thirteen of the applications include emergency shelter projects, one includes a long-term housing project, and two include both project types. DCF is currently reviewing applications to verify eligibility and prioritize the requests. A number of the proposals are in the early stages of development, with uncertain timelines, and only capacity estimates. A breakdown of the proposed capacity, as understood at this time, is below:

Proposed Emergency Shelter Capacity and Timelines (in households):

Winter 2024-25 Emergency Shelter Capacity Only	Emergency Shelter Capacity 2024-25 Winter & Beyond	Post-Winter Emergency Shelter Capacity
49	144	89

Many of the proposals include acquisition of new land and/or buildings or the renovation of existing properties, as well as staffing and other operational costs for several months. The review committee will review proposals in mid-July. The review committee includes members from DCF, the AHS Secretary’s Office, AHS Field Services, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Housing Finance Agency, and the Department of Housing and Community Development. DCF anticipates following up on proposals throughout July and issuing awards on a rolling basis. Many of the proposals involve potential real estate transactions, local permitting processes, and the need for ongoing community outreach, all of which will take time and discretion due to the sensitive nature of real estate acquisition, shelter siting and the active awards process, so DCF is limited in the level of specifics it can provide at this time.

Next Steps

DCF will provide an update by September 1, 2024, and again on November 1, 2024, with more detail, “...addressing the Department’s efforts to develop sufficient emergency shelter beds, including updates on work to provide overnight shelter and daytime solutions in advance of December 1, 2024.” Act 133 (2024), Sec. E.321.1(b)(2).