

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Joint Fiscal Committee  
**From:** DCF Commissioner Dave Yacovone  
**Date:** 6 August 2013  
**Re:** General Assistance Emergency Housing Rule Update and Investments in Prevention

I have been asked to provide an update on the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program. The current situation is best described as one of transition. Last year's expenditure in emergency housing (i.e. motels) was viewed by both the legislature and the administration as unacceptable and unsustainable. DCF has made new GA investments that are believed to reduce the pressures on the emergency housing program.

### **Limiting Motel Expenditures to \$1.5 million**

With a legislatively mandated limit of \$1.5 million for the GA emergency housing program, a temporary rule was filed on August 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 laying out four population categories who present especially high health and safety risks. The emergency rule grants categorical eligibility for each of these populations. These categories include households with: a) children under age six, b) elderly (over age 65), c) a person on SSI or SSDI, and d) pregnant women in their third trimester.

For households not within these four "vulnerable population" categories, some may qualify for emergency housing if they have enough other risk factors, as identified through a point system, to warrant emergency housing. These risk factors include: children under age 18, recent hospitalization, pending SSI/SSDI application, and/or veteran status. It is fully expected that the combined changes of limiting access to emergency housing to these categories of vulnerable populations, the 28 days of emergency housing limit, and limiting eligibility to those households who did not cause their own homelessness, will help decrease the expenditure for emergency housing in 2014.

There are two other activities that will positively impact motel expenses. Plans are moving forward with the transition of a Shelburne Road motel into a transitional shelter. Chittenden Housing Trust has a purchase and sale agreement on the facility and plans to have the 38 room facility operational by December. The administration is also working with the Red Cross to establish cold weather shelter capacity in Chittenden County on the coldest nights and is optimistic this will be in place before winter takes hold.

### **Upstream Investments**

While limited access to motels is important to reach the budget target, critical investments have been





made in our communities to help keep families from losing their housing in the first place. The table below highlights three years of financial data and shows the increase in upstream interventions in 2014.

2012			2013			2014		
Total GA	Prevention and rapid rehousing	%	Total GA	Prevention and rapid rehousing	%	Total GA	Prevention and rapid rehousing	%
\$6.5	\$2.3	35	\$6.6	\$2.3	35	\$8.2	\$3.8	46

The prevention and rapid rehousing investments in 2014 include: \$1.2 million in additional funding for community housing grants (CHG) and a targeted investment of \$400,000 in family support housing grants in three of Vermont’s highest need communities. Communities have been authorized to spend up to 10% of their local CHG allocation on upstream services. If each community avails itself of this option, approximately \$295,000 will be spent statewide in effective strategies with families before their housing is at risk. This flexibility was created to allow communities to offer services before families reach the narrow HUD-defined “risk of homelessness” criteria. An additional 20% of the CHG funding can serve households between 30% and 50% AMI. By targeting up to 30% of the total \$2.9 million CHG funding toward more flexible and upstream services DCF is confident a reduction in the demand for emergency housing will be seen once these initiatives are fully operational.

**Rule-Making Timeline**

The timeline regarding the rule-making process is:

1. The proposed rule is expected to be filed with the Secretary of State’s Office and the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) on August 16, 2013.
2. Public hearings will be held on Friday, September 20, 2013 at 10:00 a.m. (vulnerable population) and 11:00 a.m. (catastrophic), at 109 South Main Street, Waterbury, Vermont 05671.
3. Written comments may be submitted no later than 4:30 p.m. Friday, September 27, 2013.
4. On or before Tuesday, October 1, 2013 copies of the final proposed rule are expected to be filed with the Secretary of State and the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR).
5. The department expects to present the rule to LCAR on Thursday, October 17, 2013.
6. The department expects to file the final rule no later than Friday, November 15, 2013.
7. The rule is expected to be effective on November 30, 2013 (vulnerable populations) and December 1, 2013 (catastrophic).

Please let me know if you have additional questions.

