

TO: Governor Phil Scott
Senate President Pro Tempore Tim Ashe
House Speaker Mitzi Johnson
Date: June 4, 2020
Re: Ending Homelessness in Vermont

We write to you as members of the Brattleboro Area Interfaith Leadership Alliance to thank you for your attention and for your extensive and thoughtful labors on behalf of the citizens of Vermont..

For the past two decades we have been working alongside countless others in the Brattleboro area to provide shelter and meals for those living without housing in Brattleboro and to prevent the deaths of people who otherwise be dying on our streets and in our temporary shelters. Even before the pandemic this year alone six people died while homeless in our community.

As you well know, Vermont currently has \$1.25 billion in funding since President Donald Trump signed the CARES Act last month. Now you and other Vermont lawmakers have until the end of the year to decide how to spend these funds. To you comes the question of whether you will use this opportunity to repair the breach of inequities in our state economy.

Josh Davis, the executive director of Groundworks Collaborative here in Brattleboro, along with seventeen other leaders in Vermont's housing, shelter and service provider network have sent you a plan that provides a clear path for everyone in Vermont to have housing as a critical response to this very real public health emergency. This plan is built on the logic that solving homelessness is not rocket science. It is not a complex enigma. Homelessness is solved when we have ample housing stock coupled with rental subsidies and supportive services.

On April 28 he wrote: "Homelessness has been stopped in its tracks in Brattleboro. As I write this, there is not a single person that I am aware of that does not currently have shelter. This is an incredible achievement. What's more incredible is that it was accomplished within the last 30 days." He also suggested that this does not have to be a temporary fix.

Sue Graff at the Agency of Human Services points out that healing begins with housing. Other issues such as substance abuse and mental illness and joblessness--which are often pointed to as causes are often, and, in fact, the direct results of homelessness. Even so, we have been shown that even in our most hopeless times good things are possible.

You have the means at hand, as leaders and lawmakers in Vermont, to create a moral economy, to make decisions based on the recognition that we are connected and that the well-being of one is connected to the many. Our local state legislators are already on board and what was thought to be impossible happened here and can continue happening if you choose to exercise your substantial political will to fund the housing and support for the poorest of the poor. Under your leadership we have kept the pandemic at bay. We urge you to permanently end the scourge of homelessness and we will support you to make it happen.

Most Sincerely,

Members of the Brattleboro Area Interfaith Leadership Alliance:

Rev. Tony Acheson, United Church of Christ
Rev Shayna Appel, All Souls Church, Unitarian Universalist
Rev. Dr. Scott Couper, Centre Congregational Church, UCC
Rev. Robert C. Hamm, Newfane Congregational Church
Rev. Shawn Bracebridge, First Congregational Church of Dummerston, UCC

Karen Davis, Moderator, First Baptist Church
Claire Halverson, Putney Friends Meeting
Rev. Mary Lindquist, Rector, St. Michael's Episcopal Church
Rev. Matt Miller, Community Bible Chapel, Pastor
Rabbi Lee Moore, Brattleboro Area Jewish Community
Marie L. Procter, Secretary, Brattleboro Baha'i Community
Rev. Jean Smith, St Michael's Episcopal Church
Rev. Dr. Lise Sparrow, Guilford Community Church, UCC
Claire M. Stanley, Teacher, Vermont Insight Meditation Center
Rev Audrey Walker. First Congregational Church of West Brattleboro
Rev. Susie Webster-Toleno, Congregational Church of Westminster West, UCC.
Rev Dr. Randall K Wilburn, Joan Pouliot, Trinity Lutheran Church
Cheryl Wilfong, Teacher, Vermont Insight Meditation Center