

Remarks of Lt. Governor Molly Gray
VAHC Homelessness Awareness Day and Vigil
January 27, 2021

Thank you, Erhard Mahnke and the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition for the opportunity to speak at this year's Homelessness Awareness Day and Vigil.

The last year has exposed what so many here today have always known: too many of our fellow Vermonters continue to struggle to access safe, permanent and affordable housing.

The statistics matter. Vermont is the 16th most expensive state in the nation when it comes to a housing wage. To afford a 2-bedroom apartment, Vermonters on average need to make \$23/hour. On average, 48% of Vermonters renting apartments spend 30% of income on rent. When it comes to the most marginalized in our communities, particularly the 1% of Vermont's population that is African American, 8% experience homelessness. Finally, as of this month, 2,512 adults and 386 children, reside in hotels and motels across Vermont as part of emergency voucher system launched in response to this pandemic.

It is no secret that Vermont's leadership, specifically the leadership of those here today, to launch and continue this emergency housing system saved lives and set Vermont's response apart from the nation. For this tireless work in the most challenging of times, you should be incredibly proud.

But the work, as we all know, is far from over. As we look to recover stronger from this pandemic, we have an opportunity to re-think everything. We cannot go back to the way things were.

We have an opportunity to turn our greatest challenges into our greatest opportunities. Making the successes of addressing housing during this pandemic permanent, being top among them.

I know you will hear from legislative leaders today and from the Scott Administration about the critical permanent investments and initiatives underway and to come.

I will close by paraphrasing a champion for human rights, the late Eleanor Roosevelt, who often asked and answered, "where...do universal human rights begin? ... close to home!"

Human rights begin in our communities here across Vermont, and in our State House. Housing is a human right.

I look forward to working with the legislature, Governor and all of you here today to recover stronger from this pandemic and to ensure the human dignity and human rights of everyone in our communities."