

Rep. Peter Welch on Thursday introduced new legislation to help small states, like Vermont, combat homelessness. Welch, along with Kentucky Republican Rep. Geoff Davis, sponsored the PATH Enhancement bill, which adjusts the small-state formula for the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program.

Created in 1990, the PATH program funds state efforts to provide outreach and services to those suffering from mental illness or substance abuse and who are at risk of becoming homeless. Though most states have benefited from an increase in funding over the years, twenty-one smaller states – including Vermont – have received no funding increases, despite the rising cost of services and an increase in demand.

Welch's and Davis' bill would increase the small state minimum from \$300,000 per year to \$750,000 per year. An additional nine states who received funding below \$750,000 would also benefit.

"Homelessness continues to plague communities throughout Vermont, but those who fight this endemic problem have been forced to do so with fewer and fewer resources," Welch said. "We must ensure that states like Vermont have the tools they need to support those in need."

Administered by the Vermont Department of Mental Health, PATH funds support programs at:

- Brattleboro Drop-In Center, Brattleboro
- Neighborworks, West Rutland
- Good Samaritan Haven, Barre
- Community Health Center, Burlington
- Northeast Kingdom Community Action Group, Newport
- Green Mountain Support Group/Another Way, Montpelier

Brian Smith, Housing Program Administrator for the Vermont Department of Mental Health, said, "The introduction of this legislation is the most important recognition of the work done to outreach and engage homeless mentally ill Vermonters by federally funded PATH providers. For twenty years, this program has not increased funding to smaller states. This action will

initiate an opportunity to remedy that system challenge."

Melinda Bussino, executive director of the Brattleboro Drop-In Center, said, "I cannot express strongly enough how vital the expanded small states minimum funding for PATH has become. This past winter our agency, which runs a winter overflow shelter in Brattleboro, sheltered 134 people, 90 percent of whom were PATH clients. Expanding this funding is urgent if we are to prevent Vermonters who are homeless and have mental illness from freezing to death in the coming winters."