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Senate

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE VERMONT STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, for 50 years, the Vermont State Housing Authority, VSHA, has helped make available secure, safe, and affordable housing in my home State of Vermont.

Founded in 1968, the Vermont State Housing Authority provides thousands of Vermonters with the resources they need to find housing that works for them. As the first statewide housing authority in the Nation, VSHA was a pioneer in the field, as they built a successful program from the ground up without existing State models or best practices to replicate.

Not only does VSHA help Vermonters of all ages and backgrounds find a home through Federal or State programs, they also provide critical support to those who need it most. The VSHA offers a variety of assistance and resources to the refugee population that has settled in Vermont, including free interpreter services and the promise of a friendly face ready to help navigate a new beginning in an unfamiliar culture. Further, VSHA staff make what can be a frightening transition more tailored, personal, and comfortable—helping new citizens acclimate and assimilate into their new communities.

From connecting families in need with resources from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to developing innovative programs that inspire self-sufficiency and long-term independence, to promoting affordable housing for veterans, VSHA is involved in every community in Vermont. VSHA, through the Family Self-Sufficiency

Program, helps families achieve economic stability and independence. As of the fall of last year, the program has graduated 194 people and has assisted a total of 153 Vermonters in becoming first-time homeowners through the homeownership program. While homeownership is a critical piece of building wealth and a hallmark of the American dream, it is often a far off dream for many families who struggle just to find a stable and affordable place to call home.

As more and more families struggle to make ends meet, especially when affordable units are few and far in between and housing prices continue to rise, the team at VSHA, led by their executive director of more than 30 years, Richard Williams, has worked hard to ensure that we work to meet the needs of our community. Though support for our most vulnerable populations is first and foremost in the minds of the VSHA team, it is clear that civic engagement and involvement plays a large role as well. The VSHA is involved in partnerships with dozens of Vermont nonprofit organizations, State and Federal agencies, and private sector businesses. Through their work rehabilitating and managing buildings, VSHA has revitalized our communities and downtowns one by one.

The Vermont State Housing Authority has made a lasting difference in the lives of Vermonters across our great State. For that, I thank them. On behalf of all Vermonters, congratulations on 50 years of hard work, dedication, and outstanding commitment to those you serve.