



Good afternoon, esteemed members of the committee. My name is Andrew Gonyea, and I serve as the Co-Founder and Director of Operations for the Vermont Foundation of Recovery. I am here to offer my testimony in support of the language added to H.639 concerning landlord-tenant law as it pertains to certified recovery residences in Vermont. I urge you to consider supporting the inclusion of this language as passed by the House in S.186, as it represents a legislative solution essential for the safety and successful recovery of all residents.

My journey in advocating for recovery residences is deeply personal. Having experienced incarceration from 2005 to 2008, I emerged with a renewed sense of purpose. During my time in prison, I maintained sobriety, pursued education, and underwent profound self-reflection. This period of introspection led me to dedicate my life to establishing safe and sober living environments for individuals in recovery. Upon my release, I recognized a glaring need for enhanced recovery housing standards. In 2008, there were no certified homes in Vermont, prompting us to adopt national standards and best practices, evolving from traditional sober houses to certified recovery homes. Since then, we've continuously challenged ourselves to improve and stabilize recovery residences. It is important to recognize that the landscape of recovery residences has changed significantly since this conversation first started, and we want to move forward in this new and improved direction and make decisions based on the landscape of today.

At the core of every recovery residence lies a distinct culture and environment, characterized by a degree of structure and accountability. From the initial application process to member orientation, transparency is paramount. We ensure that prospective members understand the expectations and commitments involved, so that people who voluntarily seek out sober living are clear on expectations and policies from the very beginning. Upholding social norms and adhering to accountability measures are fundamental to maintaining the integrity of a recovery residence. Any deviation from these standards jeopardizes the safety and well-being of all members, underscoring the importance of effective exit strategies.

Recovery residences serve as a lifeline for individuals navigating the transition from addiction treatment to independent living. By fostering a safe, sober, and supportive environment, these residences empower members to develop crucial life skills, forge meaningful peer connections, and mitigate the risk of relapse. However, maintaining these standards requires diligence and proactive measures. In instances where members fail to uphold their commitments, we employ a systematic approach to address the situation. Our policies prioritize the safety and stability of all members in the home.

VFOR staff are trained to assess and respond to the immediate needs of members in a crisis situation. When circumstances necessitate a member's exit from the home, we prioritize their safety and well-being through individually tailored safety net plans. These plans, established in collaboration with the member, outline potential courses of action if a member is asked to exit a home. In cases where a member is intoxicated, we offer temporary accommodation in one of our designated emergency locations. If a member's condition is deemed medically unstable, we prioritize their well-being by facilitating transportation to the nearest emergency department for assessment and care. Once medically stable, individuals are escorted back to our emergency location, where our staff remain present until stability is ensured. These emergency accommodations are designed for multi-day stays, providing individuals with the necessary time and space to evaluate their circumstances and plan their next steps.

Throughout this process, our primary objective is to determine the most appropriate course of action to support the member, whether it involves returning to inpatient treatment, returning to a VFOR home,



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relocating to another VFOR location, or transitioning to another reputable recovery residence such as Jenna's Promise. Regardless of the circumstance, our dedicated staff go above and beyond to support members during times of crisis, ensuring they receive the care and resources needed to navigate challenges effectively while protecting the other members of the home. I want to add, the level of staffing needed to provide this support is one of the main reasons we asked for additional funding this year, and we thank your Committee for your support of that funding. It is our understanding that the funding allocated in the House budget has moved to the contingency funding list in the senate. This funding is needed to support wraparound services for members of recovery residences, and we ask for your support in helping to preserve this funding through the budget process.

It's essential to acknowledge that members retain autonomy in their decisions, and while we strive to address every issue comprehensively, there are limitations to what we can achieve within the system of care. Recovery residences complement a broader network of support services, offering a vital component in the continuum of care for individuals in recovery. We fill a critical niche, but we cannot be solely responsible for every aspect of care that an individual suffering from an addiction may need. We need to be able to work in partnership with treatment and medical services, providers of stabilizations beds, and community supports. The whole system needs to be strengthened to provide the level of support that this committee knows is needed.

In conclusion, the inclusion of language regarding landlord-tenant law in support of certified recovery residences is imperative for safeguarding the well-being and success of residents in Vermont. I urge you to support this legislative solution, recognizing its pivotal role in promoting lasting recovery and community well-being. Thank you for your time and consideration.