

I am here today to testify in support of the language added to H.639 regarding landlord-tenant law as it relates to certified recovery residences in Vermont. My name is Danielle Wallace, I am the director of the Turning Point Center of Addison County and a person in long-term recovery. What that means to me is that I have not used any substances in nearly a decade.

I am extremely grateful that today the thought of getting high does not consume me. In fact, it almost never crosses my mind. This was not the case in early recovery. I spent 15 years of my life trying to get and stay sober. During this time, I tried everything, I attended multiple in-patient rehabilitation facilities, resided at many different recovery residences and enrolled in more intensive outpatient programs than I can count.

As we all know, early recovery is hard. There are temptations and triggers all around us. Whether it's the liquor store that you drive by each day on the way to work or the dealer you happen to run into at the grocery store, the desire to use is all consuming at times. I was told early on that building a strong foundation would rob these temptations of their power.

Recovery residences play a critical role in the substance use disorder continuum of care and help create a strong foundation. Not only do they provide a safe substance-free environment to sleep at night, they are also designed to encourage camaraderie, interpersonal connection and above all else accountability for recovery. Unlike moving into an apartment, recovery homes cultivate family-like relationships and social networks that provide support, friendship and hope. For homes to remain safe, they must be substance free. To remain substance free, there must be a solid structure and accountability among all residents.

I can attest to how important this structure and accountability is. In the summer of 2014, I had just concluded an 18-month in-patient rehabilitation program and was living in a recovery residence. It was my choice to live there, as is always the case, and upon entry I agreed to follow the rules, which of course included staying sober. The structure provided and the clear expectations of me were critical for encouraging me to get serious about staying sober. During my initial months living there, I felt like I had everything under control. I felt like I had built up enough recovery capital to be successful. I was working full-time, attending regular 12-step recovery meetings, and working with a sponsor on a regular basis. I was living in the home full of hope that I had finally put the chaos of substance use behind me. I quickly developed strong relationships with the other women living in the house. It is almost impossible not to develop these bonds when we all share a kitchen, living room and bathroom. I felt welcomed, supported, and understood by my peers.

The 4-bedroom single family home housed 8-women. My roommate and I had so much in common. We attended 12-step meetings together, went to the gym together and spent many nights talking and laughing until the early morning. After being there for a few months, she informed me she had relapsed. I decided that instead of informing the other women in the house, I would keep her use a secret and try to help her on my own. Every night I watched her come out of the bathroom and hide what she had left in her top drawer and every night she promised me this would be the last time. She never pressured me to use with her but seeing her in active use was enough to chip away at my recovery capital. In less than a week, I had convinced myself that using just once would not be a problem. Euphoric recall, denial and rationalization took hold and because she was also using, I had a partner to help me justify that this time it would be different.

Unfortunately, I have told myself this lie many times before and like all my past relapses this time was not any different. Instantly my mindset shifted from recovery, work, and family to getting and staying high. We hid from the other women in the house as much as possible but the changes in our behavior was clear and at the next house meeting, we were both asked to take a drug test and upon the results we were asked to leave. Remember this was in 2014, and at the time, there was no contingency plan in place. I had 30 minutes to vacate the property, and 1 week to remove all of my belongings.

I want to be clear that this type of immediate exit with little support does not take place in certified homes currently. As you've heard, staff of certified homes continuously go above and beyond to support an individual who relapses. While this particular residence did not prove to be the final answer for me, it did give me some resources I could use later on, and the structure provided was helping until I was exposed to the very substances I was trying to stay away from inside the residence.

The other six women in the home gave me incredible examples of how possible recovery was. I did not end up harming their recovery, but I could have. I know my behavior at the time was triggering. It was important for the recovery of the six other women that my roommate and I be removed from the environment. Sometimes people refuse support when they are under the influence, and that is when it becomes really challenging because all we can do as recovery organizations is offer the support, but every individual has autonomy to make their own choices in any given moment. Much later, my friend and roommate passed away.

I am grateful that the other women remained committed to their recovery and were motivated to regain safety in the house. Active addiction is like an infectious disease, and I now know that allowing me to remain in the home could have jeopardized

the lives of 6 other women. Today our drug supply is much more dangerous than it was in 2014. I am supportive of the language added to H.639 regarding landlord-tenant law as it relates to certified recovery residences in Vermont because it helps us to maintain and expand the safety net of support that is so vital in early recovery.

As a single mother, I fully appreciate the issues faced by people seeking safe, affordable housing and protection from difficult landlords, but this is not that. This is a matter of placing the courts in the middle of managing recovery residences; this is equal to jeopardizing multiple people in a recovery residence to provide continued housing for a single resident who is not ready to live there.

Like me, most people who work in recovery are people with lived experience. We are the ones who have been addicted to substances, and we are the ones who know what it takes to break that addiction. It is notable that we are the ones calling for this change and supporting this language. Because we have the lived experience, we understand why this is so needed. Recovery requires a sober environment, a strong structure to preserve that sober environment, and accountability for our actions. We cannot wait for more years to get this done, we need this legislative solution now. Thank you.