



Office of Mayor Miro Weinberger

Burlington Mayor Miro Weinberger's 2024 Legislative Priorities

The Mayor's priorities this year are focused on the three top issues facing the City and the State: the drug crisis, housing, and the climate.

Continued Support for the New Burlington High School

Last year's state action to fund the cleanup at the high school was a huge boost to the project. This year the state can finish the job by funding the \$20 million regional share of the Tech Center.

Urgent Action on the Drug Crisis – Vermont's top public health and public safety issue

With record numbers of Vermonters dying from drug overdoses, violent crime skyrocketing throughout the state, and unprecedented property crime degrading communities across the state, urgent action is needed on many fronts:

- Create Cabinet-level Drug Crisis Official and centralized data center: Create a Cabinet-level Special Assistant to the Governor to End the Drug Crisis with interagency authority and accountability direct statewide efforts across VDH, DOC, DPS, and AHS. The position should be supported by a new data-center mandated with tracking real-time changes public health data and public safety data to better inform our opioid policy and investments.
- Accelerate the recruitment and training of new police officers: The policing profession is facing a historic loss of officers and early retirements and unprecedented challenges in recruiting new officers. Vermont's cities need state leadership creating alternatives to the traditional, residential-only police academy to increase recruitment.
- Accelerate deployment of Opioid Settlement funds: Despite this and the legislature's approval of \$8 million in new investments in May, few on the ground changes have yet been realized and the Department of Health is projecting that creating new methadone facilities funded in May will take another 12-18 months to implement. This is unacceptable and can be accelerated by:
 - Investing 10% of Settlement Funds in expanding treatment implementation capacity.
 - Approve a budget adjustment before Town Meeting Day approving an additional \$5 million of settlement investments. The Advisory Settlement Committee will be recommending an additional \$5 million or more of investments in January, 2024.
 - Authorizing the Department of Health to waive state procurement requirements and other process requirements to accelerate implementation efforts.
- Adapt our drug treatment system: Vermont's hub and spoke treatment system was once the envy of the nation, but like a mutating virus, fentanyl has dramatically eroded its efficacy and

we are now losing far more Vermonters to addiction than when the system was first created. We must implement key treatment strategies:

- Legalize the creation of Overdose Prevention Sites.
 - Expand methadone access.
 - Restore access to mid- and long-term inpatient treatment. Length of stay in Vermont was previously 28 days, it is now 10 days.
 - Restore lost recovery residences to bridge the continuum of care: according to a 2019 Needs Assessment by Downstreet Housing¹, there are an estimated 1,200 Vermonters every year who meet the criteria for recovery housing. The state has lost 50% of its recovery residences since the start of the pandemic, from 22 facilities in 2019 to 10 today.
 - Mandate that state agencies ensure a “warm hand-off” of prisoners receiving drug treatment to community-based agencies upon release. According to DOC, 55-60% of the population in corrections received MOUD. Despite years of discussion, only approximately 50% of patients initiate community-based treatment within 15 days of release (the most vulnerable period for overdose death many individuals).
 - Incentivize local first responders to perform drug treatment outreach. State should financially encourage more local agencies to start programs like the successful Burlington Fire Department Community Response Team.
 - Accelerate and expand Contingency Management treatment for stimulants.
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- Strengthen gun safety laws: In response to a dramatic increase in gun violence throughout the state new legislation to:
 - Prohibit guns in bars, restaurants and other sensitive spaces.
 - Make reckless endangerment with a gun a felony. Numerous states including Vermont’s neighbors New Hampshire and New York, have felony charges for reckless conduct that specifically endangers the lives of others. The lack of such a charge in Vermont has complicated efforts to hold individuals accountable for recent gunfire incidents that gravely threatened bystanders.
 - Fund research on gun violence. To create effective policy and gun violence prevention measures we need better data and research to understand how guns are being accessed, used, and trafficked for the commission of a crime in Vermont. As other states have done, Vermont should fund a program for collecting and analyzing statewide data to propose gun safety policies and prevention strategies to reduce gun violence.

 - Modernize property crime statutes. According to FBI data, larceny offense counts are up statewide in Vermont from 6,581 in 2020 to 9,215 in 2022, and instances of motor vehicle theft have doubled in the same period².

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<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2024/WorkGroups/House%20Human%20Services/Bills/H.222/Witness%20Documents/H.222~Jeff%20Moreau~Report%20-%20Housing-%20A%20Critical%20Link%20to%20Recovery~2-22-2023.pdf>

² <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/home>

- Change vehicle theft statute to support prosecution: Vermont is an outlier in that it has no charge for larceny of a vehicle or larceny of a stolen vehicle, leaving officers and prosecutors to have to meet the much higher and sometimes absurd legal standard of “knowingly” operating the vehicle of another without consent.
- Change shoplifting laws to address recidivism: Vermont’s current statute for the crimes of petit larceny and grand larceny are antiquated. Many states, including the neighboring state of New York, have theft laws that provide appropriate accountability for low-level and first-time offenses while allowing prosecutors and courts to consider aggregate charges to increase penalties for repeat offenders.
- Fund Justice system to clear pandemic backlog and restore accountability. In Chittenden County over 970 pending cases are languishing in the post-pandemic backlog (6,620 statewide). This delays justice and erodes the efficacy of our diversion and treatment programs. The State should fund the expansion of judges and staff, and resources for state prosecutors, victim’s advocates, court diversion programs and pre-trial programs.

Urgent Action on Vermont’s Housing Shortage and Homelessness

The housing crisis that has been building for decades is now at an acute stage that demands urgent action at all levels of government to dramatically increase the supply of homes as quickly as possible and, in the interim, immediately increase shelter bed capacity.

- Eliminate double-regulation of Burlington properties: Eliminating the redundant layer of state permitting imposed by Act 250’s land use regulation on Burlington projects would address the biggest regulatory barrier to new homes. This could be done either through the proposed “tier” system and/or through “municipal delegation”. Regardless of the mechanism, Burlington should be fully exempt from duplicative permit review and the state must avoid an unnecessarily long implementation schedule. We need new housing now.
- Create adequate emergency shelter: AHS’s fall 2023 proposed shelter plan for the end of the motel program is inadequate and inhumane. The state urgently must create a plan, coordinated with municipalities, for new transitional, supportive shelter that is appropriate to the needs of families with young children, elderly people, people living with disabilities, and people in recovery and experiencing S.O.U.D.
- Fund additional Coordinated Entry case management services: Burlington has dramatically increased outreach personnel, yet there is a 6-8 week wait from enrollment in CE to assignment to housing case management. There are over 740 households in CE currently; this represents 1 in 100 households in the county, which is unprecedented.
- Control homestead tax rate increase: An 18% education tax increase, per early projections, would worsen the state’s affordable housing challenges.

Urgent Action on Climate

With the passage of President Biden’s Inflation Reduction Act, the fight to reduce America’s emissions now largely shifts to state and local efforts to increase the supply of renewables and implement electrification efforts. The state should take action this year to:

- Strengthen the Renewable Energy Standard (RES) to get to 100%. Burlington achieved 100% renewable energy in 2014, and since 2019 has been working on a path to achieve Net Zero Energy by 2030. It is time for Vermont to do the same, the new RES should:
 - Emphasize the benefits and importance of renewable energy that is generated in-state and in New England. For utilities already 100% renewable, like BED, tie tier 3 requirements to load growth and preserve access to existing renewable resources.
 - Keep rates as low as possible and not over-burden ratepayers.
 - Treat Tier 3 incentive requirements as a minimum, not a maximum, investment in energy transformation.
- Capture and Leverage Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Rebates for Low/Moderate Income Vermonters. The IRA is the greatest investment in energy transformation in history. BED and the City have taken numerous steps to increase local awareness, as have other utilities. Complementary state action would help ensure these programs are accessible and available to eligible Vermont consumers and contractors.
- Explore how to Advance Wind Energy in Vermont. For utilities like BED to meet future electricity demands from new, local renewable energy sources, we cannot get the job done with solar alone, and energy from offshore wind remains inaccessible to most Vermont utilities. It is timely for the Legislature to begin to explore what changes could be made to put wind energy back on the table as an option for Vermont's energy mix.