

# House Bill 222

An act relating to reducing overdoses



February 22, 2023

House Committee on Human Services

*Written Testimony of:*

Jeffrey Moreau, Executive Director

Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences

Thank you Chair Wood, Representative Whitman, and Committee Members for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 222. **This Bill takes a proactive approach toward supporting those with substance use disorder while offering a much-needed zoning definition to allow for expanded access to recovery residences and combating discrimination toward such settings. I wish to share my enthusiastic support of this important legislation.**

While not a new challenge, recent zoning obstacles in scaling recovery residences have been experienced in both Morrisville and Bennington. Such opposition creates barriers for individuals seeking recovery and requires unnecessary financial resources to an already strained and limited system of operators. It is essential that we work to remove these discriminatory barriers and ensure that recovery residences are able to be developed.

My name is Jeff Moreau and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR). VTARR is the State's Affiliate to the National Alliance for Recovery Residences (NARR). As a member of NARR, we manage annual certification by utilizing national standards. We also offer education, technical assistance, and research. VTARR actively promotes certified recovery residences and manages a bed availability system for certified homes on our website. Certification entails substantial technical assistance, especially for new operators. We embrace and share evidence-based approaches including best practices established by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

NARR Standards are designed to promote safe and effective recovery residences that are compatible with the surrounding community. By ensuring clear guidelines for operations and neighborhood relations, the NARR Standards help to address concerns that some community members may have about the impact of recovery residences on their neighborhood. More than 50 scientific studies have found that community residences for people with disabilities, including recovery residences, do not impact property values, neighborhood turnover, or public safety. Certified homes are required to implement good neighbor practices and are subject to an independent review of resident or community concerns that are unable to be resolved.

Recovery Residences are an important option for those seeking recovery. They provide an opportunity to escape an environment that may be further fueling an individual's illness. Recovery housing centers around peer support and an environment that is free from alcohol and illicit drug use. Residents live together as family while providing help to one another by sharing meals, completing household chores, and planning activities to do together. Structure, accountability, employment, and service to community are emphasized as critical responsibilities.

I am here to tell you that recovery residences work. Research has shown that individuals living in recovery residences have a greater likelihood of achieving long-term recovery. Further evidence demonstrates decreased substance use, reduced probability of relapse, lower rates of incarceration, increased employment, and improved family functioning. I have the opportunity to meet residents who have defied extraordinary challenges to pursue amazing journeys. Allow me to share a few quick stories. One of my favorite connections involved a young lady who was going back to school to become a radiologist. She had been saving money and was in the process of purchasing her first car. Prior to this, she was riding a bike to school and work. I witnessed her pride and joy in coming so far. Another resident shared that he came to his recovery home with only a pair of shoes. Today, he is a working carpenter, attending meetings daily, paying his fines, and saving money for his future. He stated, "I wouldn't be where I am without this support." He stressed that the home provides just the right mix of accountability and independence. I'm also inspired by the many individuals taking advantage of recovery residences who have chosen to go back to school and study nursing, psychology, social services, and more. There is a strong desire among residents to grow, share, and give back. Vermont Foundation of Recovery, Jenna's Promise, and the Second Wind Foundation can all share hundreds of these types of stories.

Vermonters need access to this opportunity as a resource to support their recovery! We point the Committee to a 2019 Assessment of Recovery Residences, conducted by Downstreet Housing, in coordination with the Governor's Opioid Counsel that noted recovery residences as a **critical link to recovery**. The report went on to state that among the 50 states, Vermont has the 4th highest rate of alcohol-dependence and the highest rate of substance-use disorder in the country. Of the estimated 52,000 Vermonters who suffer from some form of Substance Use Disorder, alcohol dependence accounts for roughly 2/3rds of all cases. The data suggested that between 80-90% of Vermonters with a SUD are not in treatment for their disorder. The consultant estimated that roughly 1,200 individuals, or about 14% of the Vermonters entering treatment for an SUD in 2017, would benefit from access to a Recovery Residence as a means of transition from a residential treatment facility or to support their recovery while in non-residential treatment. While progress has been made in creating additional capacity, we lost certified operators such as Phoenix House and Stone Crop during the pandemic. This has left no current recovery residence services in Brattleboro or Burlington.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Vermont experienced the highest percentage increase of any state in the nation in drug overdose deaths during the pandemic. Progress that was being made through the State's innovative hub and spoke system and recovery supports have reversed and are trending in the wrong direction. It is generally accepted that we have a crisis related to Fentanyl, prescription pain relievers, heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and now Xylazine.

At the same time, I want to emphasize, as noted above, that according to the Vermont Department of Health, "Alcohol is the most commonly used substance among Vermonters. The State has experienced a 36% increase in alcohol-attributed deaths between 2017 and 2021. Research conducted by the CDC notes that one in five deaths among adults aged 20-49 years is due to excessive alcohol use. By comparison, Vermont saw excessive alcohol use associated with nearly one in four deaths among people aged 20-34.

Substance use disorder and alcohol dependence are not a moral failing, but rather a complex medical and psychological condition that affects the brain. These conditions are generally accepted as disorders by major medical and psychological organizations, such as the American Medical Association and the American Psychological Association, which have defined addiction as a chronic disease that requires ongoing care and management.

Moreover, factors such as genetics, environment, trauma, and mental health issues can all contribute to the development of addiction. The stigma surrounding addiction can be a significant barrier to seeking treatment and recovery. It is essential to recognize addiction as a medical condition and provide people with the appropriate care, support, and resources they need to overcome it.

With the pandemic behind us, it is time that we reshape our focus toward the work of helping those to achieve recovery. In closing, we believe that this bill supports a key element of clarity to move forward with scaling a safe and effective network of recovery residences across Vermont. We implore you to secure passage of this Bill, during the current session. It will save lives and put us back on track toward the progress that was being witnessed prior to the pandemic. Again, I thank you for your attention and opportunity to testify this afternoon. Recovery Residences work, they're inexpensive, and did I mention they work? I am happy to address any of your questions today or in the future.

My contact information is noted below.

With Gratitude,

Jeffrey Moreau  
[jeff.moreau@vtarr.org](mailto:jeff.moreau@vtarr.org)

Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences  
PO Box 793, Burlington, VT 05402

[www.vtarr.org](http://www.vtarr.org)