

Dear Chair Kitchel, Vice Chair Perchlik, and Committee Members,

Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR) operates a **specialized community re-entry and substance use recovery center for justice-involved Vermonters with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health disorders**. The Vermont House Committee on Human Services and Vermont House Committee on Appropriations have **recommended a one-time appropriation of \$150,000** in support of our center and the direct services we provide. We respectfully ask for your support as well.

- Only 13% of prison staff say we are adequately preparing people for success upon release from incarceration
- Prepared or not, people are coming home to their communities every day
- Incarcerated people listed improving re-entry support as their **number one need**

Justice-involved people with substance use disorders are among those at the **very highest risk for overdose death**, especially in the weeks and months following release from incarceration. Addressing the needs within this **particularly high-impact population** has profound benefits for justice-involved people, their children and families, and communities.

Our data demonstrates that we are successfully engaging very high-risk people and that **most people were not accessing drug treatment or recovery services at the time of intake.**

At intake:

- 49% were recently released from incarceration
- 59% were unhoused
- 77% tested positive for both opioids (like heroin and fentanyl) and stimulants (like cocaine and methamphetamine)
- 82% reported current injection drug use
- 83% had experienced domestic or sexual violence
- **60% reported an overdose in the past 6 months (and 4 reported an overdose within 24 hours prior to intake)**

Our highly experienced staff are doing innovative work designed to prevent overdose deaths, reduce crime and improve communities:

- We are reaching those most at risk, including during the high-risk time immediately following release from incarceration
- We provided **in-house drug treatment to 66 people and linked many people to MOUD treatment (MAT), residential treatment, outpatient treatment and recovery services** (50% of people not enrolled in gold standard MOUD treatment for opioid use disorder at intake are now participating in MOUD)
- We helped many people address gaps in MOUD continuity following release from incarceration
- We provided **parenting support** and support in complying with DCF case plans
- We helped unhoused people secure permanent, transitional and emergency **housing** (36% of those who were unhoused at intake are now housed despite a very challenging housing environment)
- We helped incarcerated people in correctional facilities across Vermont (including to link them to recovery centers and other resources in their home communities upon release)
- We helped people meet **basic needs** for food, clothing, employment, medical care and transportation
- We provided coats, hats, gloves, hand warmers and other winter gear to dozens of people in need (many who were unhoused)
- We helped program participants buy holiday gifts for their children

Much good work is happening, but our progress is at risk. We have received funding support from the City of Burlington, University of Vermont Medical Center and the United Way, but **we still have a funding gap of about \$150,000**. We anticipate that with the requested support, we would be able to serve another 100-150 high-risk, justice-involved individuals in the coming year with services including case management, community re-entry coordination, recovery support, overdose prevention and drug treatment with contingency management.

Last year, our re-entry and recovery center for justice-involved people living with substance use disorders and co-occurring mental health disorders was just an idea. We've come a long way since then! We opened the center in August and have already successfully engaged over 125 people in services like case management, community re-entry coordination and recovery services --including 66 people enrolled in our innovative contingency management drug treatment/overdose prevention program designed in collaboration with expert consultants from UVM. Our contingency management program incentivizes abstinence from use of fentanyl and substances that commonly contain fentanyl like heroin, cocaine and methamphetamine. The program was recently featured in *Seven Days*:

[Seven Days: An Innovative Drug Treatment Program Encourages Sobriety with an Incentive](#)

Our new re-entry and recovery center and our contingency management program have been very well received by justice-involved people and the broader community. Our

experience so far has confirmed a significant unmet community need, strong demand for services and that we are on the right track with our specialized re-entry and recovery center model. **Our goal was to create a model that could successfully attract, engage and retain difficult-to-reach, high-risk people with complex unmet needs and we are achieving that goal.**

Thank you very much for considering our request!

With appreciation,

Tom

Tom Dalton, Executive Director
VCJR