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House Committee on Appropriations***Public Hearing on******Further Reductions to the Governor's Proposed FY2016 State Budget***

Testimony of Robert Purvis, Executive Director
Turning Point Center of Central Vermont

March 12, 2015

The Turning Point Center of Central Vermont is one of eleven addiction recovery centers whose entire state funding has been suggested for elimination in the February 26, 2015, draft of the Composite Reduction List. The President of the Vermont Recovery Network, Susan Walker, is presenting oral and written testimony on behalf of all eleven recovery centers comprising Vermont's statewide recovery system, as well as on behalf of the entity which supports both our local and statewide activities, the Vermont Recovery Network.

I would like to tell you one story from my center that illustrates the importance of a sustainable recovery system in addressing the burgeoning social and financial costs of addiction. In a March 10th news report, Vermont Public Radio quoted Cindy Walcott, deputy commissioner at the Department for Children and Families, as stating that between June 30, 2014, and March 6, 2015, there had been a 20% increase in minors in DCF's care, "due in large part to opiate problems." <<http://digital.vpr.net/post/child-abuse-and-neglect-cases-strain-courts-foster-system>>

We have had several inquiries recently from DCF seeking support for addicted mothers, but one notable young mother—who had a serious history of heroin addiction and abuse of other substances—began coming to Turning Point on her own after a three year hiatus. During her time away she had, among things, been arrested during a drug bust while in possession of a firearm. She had most recently completed residential treatment and a several months stay in a halfway house, but was facing the loss of her young son through termination of her parental rights. She was placed in a group home in Barre, which was not a supportive environment.

She was determined to stay clean and sober, but her recovery was fragile and her situation precarious. She first enrolled in our evidence-based, six-week, “Making Recovery Easier” program, which she completed. She also began coming to Turning Point on a daily basis to talk with others about the problems she was facing and her struggles to change her behavior.

She desperately wanted her son back, but despaired of losing him completely. Her initial interactions with DCF personnel and others were not helpful to her cause (although she has maintained continuous abstinence throughout). But she got honest feedback and support from Turning Point staff and volunteers, who listened without judgment and offered advice where appropriate. Over time her behavior improved, and she was granted visitations with her son. Her group home living environment was deemed unsuitable for visitations, so we arranged for her to use our main meeting room twice a week, where she and her son could play ping-pong (his favorite) and board games, assemble jig saw puzzles, and just visit.

Now, six months after she first came to us, she has been notified that the TPR hearing has been canceled and that all concerned—including the state’s attorney—are recommending a permanent guardianship instead. Our young mom is thrilled, and even more motivated to continue working on her recovery and building a life that she hopes, one day, will include her son. In the meantime she has been working as a volunteer at Turning Point, and we hope to train her to provide support to others. Her son, for his part, is benefiting from a stronger and healthier relationship with his mother.

There is no other kind of facility or program in Vermont that could have provided the level and duration of support that this woman has received at Turning Point. Our recovery centers are the only places where people with substance use disorders of all kinds and degrees can find the support they need for as long as they need it, as well as a warm introduction to a recovery community that can play a major role in their getting into long-term recovery.

It has taken eight years for our Recovery Network and eleven recovery centers to get where we are today — and we still don’t have the resources to do all that we can. If our state funding is cut this year, the Vermont Recovery Network and most of our recovery centers won’t be around next year no matter how rosy the budget outlook may be. We urge you not to take the irrevocable step of cutting our funding. Thank you for your consideration.