

**TESTIMONY of Jeff Moreau on behalf of the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences and Recovery Partners of Vermont regarding S. 186 - An act relating to the systemic evaluation of recovery residences and recovery communities**

Dear Senator Lyons and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare:

I am grateful for the opportunity to address you today as part of our Recovery Day activities. My name is Jeff Moreau and I serve as the Executive Director of the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR).

Today, I am accompanied by...

- Tracy Hauk, Turning Point of Rutland County
- Krista Chesbro, Jenna's Promise

We are representing Recovery Partners of Vermont, as we advocate for your support on crucial appropriations and legislation. We ask for your support of the following priorities:

- An allocation of \$1,500,000 for Community-Based Peer Recovery Coaching.
- Increased base funding in the amount of \$1,559,000 for Vermont's Certified Recovery Residences.
- Support for the Opioid Settlement Committee's recommendation of \$325,000 from settlements funds for Recovery Residence Scholarships.
- Legislative measures aimed at enhancing the safety and well-being of all residents within recovery residences when a resident experiences a recurrence of their disease.

Tracy will provide further insight into the specifics of our recovery coaching request, particularly highlighting collaborative efforts within our corrections system. Our aim is to replicate her innovative program statewide.

We support the introduction of S. 186 - indeed we have been actively working with the Fletcher Group on the need for updating the Downstreet Housing Report, which was published in 2019. This report found that access to recovery residences was severely lacking. While we did see some energy among housing providers and early progress following release of the report - challenges with funding, zoning, ensuring the safety of all residents, and the pandemic has slowed scaling of this critical resource. As part of this work, I hope you will also consider including funding the establishment of a common resident management system across certified homes. This will allow us to collect data to inform performance improvement and also to demonstrate the outcomes of recovery residences. We have selected a product called Behave Health, which is specially designed for recovery residences and utilized by a number of NARR Affiliates and Certified programs. Jenna's Promise will be piloting this system in the near future. We estimate the cost of providing this tool to all certified homes to be \$40,000.

The focus of my remaining remarks will center around the vital importance of recovery residences. Prior to 2019, Vermont lacked oversight and guidelines regarding best practices for such residences. Since then, we have made significant strides in certifying a few dozen residences based on national standards and striving for continuous growth and improvement.

Recovery residences play a critical role for two main reasons. Firstly, Vermont's residential treatment system typically offers only two weeks of care, after which individuals are encouraged to seek follow-up care within the community. Recovery residences provide a crucial opportunity for individuals to continue their recovery journey in a supportive, sober environment designed to create sustained recovery.

Secondly, Vermont has been lauded for its hub and spoke system, providing medically assisted treatment. However, sending individuals back

to the environments that may have contributed to their substance use disorder is counterproductive. So often these environments are unhealthy and include trauma, substance use, and poor influences. Recovery residences offer a continuum of care solution by providing a supportive environment conducive to building recovery capital.

Despite these benefits, the availability of recovery residences remains limited in Vermont. The Downstreet Housing Report, *Housing: A Critical Link to Recovery* already referenced provides an Assessment of the need for recovery residences in Vermont and highlights that only about 2% of Vermont's population in need of such support actually receives it.

Prior to the pandemic, Vermont was making progress in addressing this issue. However, we have since experienced the closure of a number of programs, losing a dozen certified homes. Presently, we have only 13 certified locations, a stark contrast to New Hampshire's 100+ certified residences.

Moreover, our certified residences are operating at near full capacity, leading to lengthy waitlists that undermine the success of those seeking sober living arrangements. There is also a pressing need to expand geographically to better serve communities across the state.

The primary barriers to scaling this resource are sustainable funding and addressing safety concerns within residences. Currently, state funding covers only about 50% of operational costs, necessitating additional fundraising and expense cutting, which is unsustainable.

Furthermore, the classification of recovery residences as landlord-tenant relationships poses challenges in ensuring the safety of all residents. Specifically in how to effectively ensure the safety of all residents when an individual relapses or engages in behaviors that jeopardize the recovery and well-being of others in the household. We would like to propose the consideration of an alternative approach inspired by Maine's recent legislation, LD597. This legislation allows recovery residences to remove an individual if the residence is certified and has an approved discharge policy. Similar to Vermont, Maine's affiliate of NARR prohibits discharging

residents without a safe place to go, ensuring that no one is left without secure options. While certified homes have established systems to support residents during recurrence, the state's work in creating a network of stabilization locations is imperative.

With your support, we are confident in our ability to double the capacity of certified homes and enhance the support available to individuals on their path to recovery.

Thank you once again for your attention and proactive efforts in addressing these critical issues.

Warmly,



Jeff Moreau  
Executive Director  
Vermont Alliance for  
Recovery Residences (VTARR)