

**No. R-422. Joint resolution urging Vermont's participation in the Stepping Up initiative to reduce the number of incarcerated Vermonters with a mental illness.**

(J.R.S.35)

By Senators Sears, Ashe, Flory, Lyons, and Snelling,

*Whereas*, the Department of Corrections (DOC), in accordance with its Vermont System of Care Plan, uses the term “serious functional impairment” (SFI) to include inmates who have a serious mental illness, and

*Whereas*, the services that inmates with an SFI designation require from the DOC are greater than those of other inmates, and

*Whereas*, inmates with an SFI designation may remain in correctional facilities longer and exhibit higher recidivism rates than other inmates, and

*Whereas*, upon release, inmates that had an SFI designation may need specialized mental health care services, and

*Whereas*, aside from those inmates with an SFI designation, the DOC reports that approximately 40 percent of the male inmate population and 80 percent of the female inmate population have been treated for a diagnosed mental illness, and

*Whereas*, these other inmates place an extra service demand on Vermont’s correctional and mental health systems, even though diagnosticians would not necessarily characterize these inmates’ mental illness as serious, and

*Whereas*, the National Association of Counties, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and the American Psychiatric Foundation have developed a national initiative called Stepping Up to reduce the number of incarcerated persons who have a mental illness, and

*Whereas*, the Stepping Up initiative encourages a collaborative and data-driven approach to reducing safely the number of inmates who have a mental illness, and this project merits the State of Vermont’s participation, *now therefore be it*

***Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives:***

That the General Assembly urges the Department of Corrections, in partnership with the Department of Mental Health, to participate in the Stepping Up initiative, including:

- 1) reviewing State policies that can support Stepping Up, including investments in mental health and corrections that can advance local collaborative efforts;
- 2) facilitating connections to health care and community-based treatment services;
- 3) sharing lessons learned and promising practices throughout the Vermont correctional and mental health care systems; and
- 4) incorporating the goals of Stepping Up into the objectives of existing correctional and mental health planning and programs, *and be it further*

***Resolved:*** That the Secretary of State be directed to send a copy of this resolution to the Commissioner of Corrections and the Commissioner of Mental Health.