

Testimony on H.223 to House General, Housing and Military Affairs
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H. 223 – To begin, VTARR has reviewed the bill as introduced and we have identified a few corrections we would request. Given that Vermont now has our own affiliate of the National Alliance for Recovery Residences (NARR), we would like to replace the language that refers to “Vermont’s affiliate of the National Alliance for Recovery Residences” with “Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR)”. (Page 1 lines 10 and 19, page 2 line 1 and line 9). As well, we would like to replace the word “home” with “residence (page 2, line 8). Finally, we would like to add the word “illicit” in front of drug-free. (Page 2, line 17).

On behalf of VTARR and Downstreet, I will speak in support of H.223. Recovery Residences are by their nature safe, alcohol and illicit drug-free environments. They are abstinence-focused living environments cushioned from a world where substance use is a central focus. A key tenet of recovery residences is that the individual in recovery has an extended period of time to establish healthy routines without the temptation of substance use within the home environment. Recovery Residences create a safe, stable community of peer support in which a person in early sobriety can find a foundation for lifelong recovery. VTARR believes it is critical to pass H.223 so that recovery residence operators can ensure the safety of residents as well provide the best environment for sustained recovery.

In late February, I shared some early results of the report *Housing: A Critical Link to Recovery*. Included in the report are some startling statistics:

Vermont has a serious substance use disorder problem affecting more than 52,000 residents, or one in 10 individuals over age 12. Only DC has a higher concentration.

The report estimates that some 1200 individuals would benefit from a recovery residences. Currently, there are 212 beds in the state.

More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of Vermonters in treatment today are Medicaid-eligible, placing nearly all of them in the category of Extremely Low Income.

Housing instability represents one of the greatest external hurdles to a recovery that is already inherently difficult.

I have shared the report’s Executive Summary as part of my testimony.

In March, the Governor and others joined me at our Downstreet offices in Barre to share the report as well as the launch the R4R Initiative. R4R is a partnership of Vermonters collectively working to accelerate the successful development and adoption of RRs with urgency, compassion, and relief that many thousands of Vermonters are in need of today. R4R goals are to develop at least 12 new recovery residences in the next 18 months, to increase housing stability for people living with SUD, and maybe most importantly, to build strong, supportive

communities. With the opening of several new RR's in the next 18 months, it is critical that we take action now to pass H223.

As the Executive Director of Downstreet, I am deeply familiar with Vermont landlord/tenant law and appreciate the extensive protections provided to Vermont renters. Speaking for VTARR and RR operators, in the very rare event that an individual would be asked to leave a RR, I can assure you that we are all deeply sensitive to their needs both for housing and community services and support. Part of the certification process for VTARR includes a review of a recovery residences compliance with VTARR's standards of practice. Recently, VTARR adopted the NARR standards that I shared as part of my testimony. Additionally, VTARR adopted the NARR Code of Ethics also included in my testimony. VTARR believes that these two documents and the certification process that RR will undergo will ensure that recovery residences operators will treat departing individuals with the integrity, respect, and compassion.

In closing, I ask for your support of H.223 and I thank you for your time and consideration.