

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing to express my deep concerns about the exception to housing law for those classified as recovery homes, in H 783. As a social worker and someone who has previously worked for many years with individuals experiencing chronic homelessness* many of whom struggled with substance use, I am in deep opposition to this bill. The importance of stable, and supportive housing to those in recovery is paramount to keeping people safe, engaged and alive. Stable housing is a key factor in a person's ability to fully engage in treatment and recovery. Working for five years at Pathways Vermont and seeing the many successes for those who finally had stable housing has shown me this. Additionally, the cost of re-incarceration or hospitalization is much higher than ensuring stable, permanent, supportive housing. A bill like H 783 will create fear and destabilize housing and recovery. The types of draconian disregard for individual tenant rights being proposed for those struggling with substance will be deeply harmful. Given that people do not have ready access to safe medication-assisted treatment options the measures being proposed amount to punishment of an individual for seeking out what they need to recover that we are not providing.

Furthermore, as you know substance use disorder is classified as a disability and as such is a protected class and the proposed changes to housing law in my view would be paramount to housing discrimination based on a disability. To suspend tenant protection law solely on the basis of a disability is not only cruel it is illegal under the Americans with Disabilities and Fair Housing Acts. Please do not pass this law out of committee as it stands it will do great harm to people who are already vulnerable and struggling for their lives. These individuals need more protections not less and a community that works to heal the traumas they have experienced, not one that further traumatizes them. We should be working towards housing first as a human right not throwing vulnerable people onto the streets with no protections.

Thank you for your time and please do the right thing.

Sincerely,

Tanya Vyhovsky, LICSW
Essex Junction, VT

*chronic homeless is defined by experiencing homelessness for nine to twelve months or three or more times.

<https://www.pathwaysvermont.org/what-we-do/our-programs/housing-first/>