

Dear Chair Lippert and House Health Care Committee,

We as Representatives ask that you support expanding Housing First through the Department of Mental Health to Bennington County.

While the COVID-19 pandemic will have a lasting impact on both mental health and housing security statewide, Bennington County has one of the highest rates of chronic homelessness in the state, with over 70 households identified as experiencing chronic homelessness. This \$390,000 appropriation will facilitate an additional 30 households experiencing chronic homelessness to be supported through Housing First services.

We know that people with mental health care needs are best served when they have stable housing. Housing First services are cost effective by preventing emergency room visits, public safety interventions, and stays at residential facilities, as well as providing the stability for people receiving services to better contribute to our community. While significant state and local resources are dedicated to transitioning people out of homelessness, we want to ensure that there are the social support services necessary to make these housing connections sustainable.

Housing First services are currently being provided in a limited capacity in Bennington County through a contract between Pathways Vermont and the Department of Corrections. Through this work, we have seen Pathways Vermont's success and ability to collaborate and communicate with other community partners. We ask that Bennington County join the six other Vermont counties also funded for Housing First services within the Department of Mental Health.

Thank you for your consideration,

Representative Nelson Brownell, Bennington 1  
Representative Dane Whitman, Bennington 2-1  
Representative Timothy Corcoran, Bennington 2-1  
Representative Mary A. Morrissey, Bennington 2-2  
Representative Michael Nigro, Bennington 2-2  
Representative David Durfee, Bennington 3  
Representative Seth Bongartz, Bennington 4  
Representative Kelly Pajala, Windham-Bennington-Windsor

February 16th, 2022