

## Theresa Utton-Jerman

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**Subject:** Oppose the Middlesex Replacement Facility

Dear Representatives

I'm writing to express my strong opposition to the Middlesex Replacement Facility. At a time of deep public reckoning over the harm done by punitive and carceral institutions, from Black Lives Matter to Britney Spears and Paris Hilton, a massive expansion of the most punitive and the most carceral elements of Vermont's mental health infrastructure (namely: restraint, seclusion and forced drugging) is precisely the wrong direction to be going.

There seems to be a general understanding that the current Middlesex TCR is not accomplishing the task of supporting those suffering from mental health crises, but that the only imaginable solution is to build more of the same. On the broader scale, the crisis is not fundamentally one of mental health, but one of a lack of imagination, and, apparently, an unwillingness to listen to the ideas and the wisdom of advocates and survivors of mental health crisis and its institutional responses.

Building new physical infrastructure, especially that which is currently proposed to replace the Middlesex TCR, is expensive. Building the *community* and *social* infrastructure to address mental health (such as peer respites, community supports and ending homelessness) is perhaps a less traditional approach, but is far more cost-effective, and is likely to produce far less harm and far better outcomes than a punitive and carceral system that has been proven to do the opposite.

I have attempted to help a friend find support in Vermont for a mental health crisis and found that the peer support center run by Western Mass Community Learning Community (now the [Wildflower Alliance](#)) was the only organization that was able to improve the situation. These are the sort of resources we need in our communities. Every other official intervention was at best unhelpful and at worst actively harmful and traumatizing, both for the person suffering a crisis and all those trying to help them.

I urge you to consider moving resources from institutions that cause harm in our communities toward initiatives that will generate true and deep community safety.

Wliwni, Thank you,

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