

TO: The House Committee on Health Care

FROM: Bennington Continuum of Care Partners

Proposal to Expand Pathways Vermont Housing First Services in Bennington County

Dear Chair Lippert and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Bennington Continuum of Care, please accept this letter of support in reference to Pathways Vermont's proposal to expand Housing First services in Bennington County. As members of the continuum, we are uniquely positioned to speak to the incredible need in our community to quickly and effectively expand access to permanent housing and support. Bennington County has one of the highest rates of chronic homelessness in the state and a disproportionate need relative to population size. There are currently 72 households experiencing chronic homelessness in Bennington County, as documented by our local Coordinated Entry team. Expanding the Housing First program would enable the state to make a significant impact in the lives of people experiencing homelessness in Bennington County and on the overall welfare of the community.

Pathways Vermont's Housing First program immediately ends homelessness by supporting individuals and families to locate independent apartments in the community. Housing First clients are provided long-term, multidisciplinary community support, including service coordination, drug and alcohol support, employment support, psychiatry, peer support, nursing care and representative payee services.

With an appropriation of \$390,000 Pathways Vermont can expand its contract with the Department of Mental Health to further provide Housing First services in Bennington County to meet the need. This expansion will allow Pathways to support an additional 30 households exiting chronic homelessness in our community. This investment would target households living with disabilities and significant mental health challenges who currently lack access to permanent housing. It would significantly impact the rate of chronic homelessness in our community and reduce the burden on our overtaxed emergency housing systems.

Pathways is a known partner to our continuum, having recently ended homelessness for nearly 100 individuals in Bennington through the Office of Economic Opportunity Rapid Rehousing CARES program. Additionally, their recently expanded Department of Corrections contract has successfully supported

individuals under the supervision of the Department of Corrections to exit incarceration and housing instability to independent community-based housing.

This investment would allow Pathways to replicate the very successful blended model of support that is currently operating in six counties across the state. This would provide parity for Bennington County and access to the unique and essential support of a Housing First intervention that Pathways provides.

We appreciate the committee's consideration and ask you to recommend to the House Committee on Appropriations \$390,000 for the expansion of Housing First in Bennington County.

Sincerely,

Natalie Basil, Greater Bennington Interfaith Community Services

Sarah Butterfield, Economic Services Division

Chloe Viner Collins, Bennington Coalition for the Homeless

Mary Gerisch, (VCEH Representative) Bennington Housing Authority

Nanci Gordon, Vermont 211 United Way

Jeannie Jenkins, Bennington Select Board

Madison Kremer, Shires Housing

Denise Main, Sunrise Family Resource Center

Lynn Mazza, Vermont Center for Independent Living

Amie Niles, United Counseling Services

Chandler Poling, (Chair of Bennington COC) Pathways Vermont

Leigh Russell, Veterans Affairs

Adam Sancic, Agency of Human Services