



TO: The House Committee on Healthcare
FROM: Pathways Vermont

Proposal to Expand Housing First Services in Bennington County

Dear Chair Lippert and members of the committee,

Pathways Vermont respectfully requests the House Committee on Healthcare to support an appropriation of \$390,000 to expand Housing First services in Bennington County. Pathways Vermont's mission is to end homelessness in Vermont and provide innovative mental health alternatives. 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.

In 2021, Pathways Vermont expanded our contract with the Department of Corrections to provide Housing First services in Bennington County. This partnership has already resulted in a successful local collaboration and an individualized independent housing option for Bennington residents under supervision. Pathways has secured 11 new units in the community since July in spite of the state's low vacancy rate. Eight individuals have moved in and we are in the process of coordinating the remaining move-ins.

Pathways has been talking to the Bennington delegation and local leaders and it's clear the need is great and a Department of Mental Health expansion would significantly help the situation. Bennington County has one of the highest rates of chronic homelessness in the state and a disproportionate need relative to population size. There are an estimated 70 households experiencing chronic homelessness in Bennington County, as documented by the local Coordinated Entry team. This investment 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.

With an appropriation of \$390,000 Pathways Vermont can expand our 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 the community. This investment would target households living with disabilities and significant mental health challenges and for whom long term homelessness has made community stability impossible. While our Department of Corrections contract primarily serves individuals returning to Bennington from incarceration and under DOC supervision this investment would allow us to reach households facing homelessness in Bennington, many of whom frequent our crisis and emergency response systems.

This investment would allow Pathways to replicate the very successful blended model of support that we currently offer 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 would be happy to answer any questions and provide testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hilary Melton', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Hilary Melton
Executive Director
Pathways Vermont

