

**Vermont Care Partners
Testimony on H.315
Senate Health and Welfare Committee
March 10, 2021**

Julie Tessler, Executive Director Vermont Care Partners: VT Council

Vermont Care Partners is most appreciative of the appropriation to mental health services in H.315. Our original request for one-time/short-term Investments to respond to surge in demand due to COVID was as follows:

- Short-term funding for motel/hotel outreach through non-categorical case management. The cost would be \$85,000 per case manager X 10 Designated Agencies for a total of \$850,000.
- Training on trauma-informed care and wellness support for DA/SSA staff. The cost would be \$150,000 with some shared training across the system of care and agencies investing in wellness supports for staff.
- Invest in make existing housing and community-based service facilities more accessible, safe, and ADA compliant, or to expand capacity. For years agencies have deferred capital investments in favor of sustaining services leading to unmet capital needs. If a capital Investments are possible, we would benefit by these investments:
 - a. New Facilities \$8.8 million
 - Housing for homeless, elders, adults with mental health and I/DD, crisis beds, office space
 - b. Renovations, Upgrades \$7 million
 - Address safety risks, insulation, ADA and HIPPA compliance, air filtration systems, elevators/ chair lifts
 - c. Repairs and Maintenance \$1 million
 - Replace roofs, windows, doors, flooring, carpeting, ramps, boilers, kitchens
- Address one-time COVID expenses not covered by federal resources – HVAC systems, equipment, and testing.

A Statewide Network Supporting Vermonters to Lead Healthy and Satisfying Lives Community by Community

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The bill makes the following appropriations to the Department of Mental Health;

- Section 3. \$300,000 general funds for grants to peer-led and -impacted member-led organizations for Emergency Outreach Service Grants. Of these funds, the Department should allocate \$150,000 to peer-support organizations and \$150,000 to organizations supporting the needs of LGBTQ youths. **No comment**
- Section 4. \$4 million general funds for Housing Supports in community settings; The grants shall be awarded to organizations that demonstrate the greatest ability to respond immediately to the need for housing supports and shall be for projects that will not require additional State funds for operating costs in future years or that can redirect current expenditures, or both. To the greatest extent possible, grants shall be awarded for projects in underserved areas of the State. At least one grant shall be awarded to a peer-run or peer-directed housing organization. Priority criteria: (1) create movement within the current system of care, such as those that would move individuals out of hospitals and other restrictive settings and back to a community setting. (2) focus on equity and on providing patient-centered care; and (3) employ or build on successful, evidence-based models of supportive housing.

Recommendation

It would be appropriate for the funds to be appropriated to **AHS** who would then, in consultation with Vermont Care Partners and peer run organizations, allocate the funds to DA/SSAs and peer-led organizations to address **developmental** and mental health service needs. Also, please consider using this simplified language: *Grants may be used to make existing housing and community-based service facilities more accessible, safe, and ADA compliant, or to expand capacity.*

- Section 5. \$850,000 general funds to provide case management staff at the Designated and Specialized Service Agencies. Each DA and SSA needs to hire an additional case manager for one year to provide case management services to Vermonters whose lives have been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic and who need of urgent supports right now.

Recommendation

Raise the appropriation to \$1.02 million to cover 10 designated and 2 specialized service agencies or if the appropriation remains at \$850,000 then only allocate the funds to the 10 designated agencies to fully fund each case management position for 1 year.

- Section 6. \$150,000 general funds for training and wellness supports for front line health care workers to help them meet Vermonters' current mental health needs, such as training for emergency department personnel responding to an increased demand for crisis services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and training on trauma-informed and trauma-specific care for mental health professionals responding to the surge in mental health treatment needs. The staff would also benefit from wellness supports as they continue to care for people in crisis while experiencing their own stress, anxiety, and trauma as a result of the pandemic.

Recommendation

Clarify this language. Who will provide the training and to which health personnel? Vermont Care Partners would be glad to provide training for frontline health workers on trauma-informed and trauma-specific care through our webinar series at minimal cost. Specify a dollar- amount for wellness supports for DA/SSA staff.