

Testimony for: Fiscal Year 2024 Budget: Public Hearings

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My name is Margae Diamond. I am the Director for Turning Point Recovery Center, Bennington and I am a person in long term recovery. I was born and raised in Bennington and recently returned after spending 30 years in the San Francisco Bay Area. Turning Point is a proud member of Recovery Partners of Vermont and aligned with our peer recovery colleagues statewide. I'm speaking today to advocate for an increase of **\$1.85 million for peer recovery organizations and \$1m for Recovery residences.**

Retired colonel Jim Baker is currently working in Bennington to help us craft a strategic, unified plan to address the harms from SUD. Having a cohesive community roadmap is critical. But those plans won't bear fruit if there aren't enough people to execute.

Peer recovery coaching is one tool in the toolbox. However, that one tool is critically distinct because it comes with Lived Experience. Lived Experience, combined with training and Motivational Interviewing skills, has proven to uniquely connect with those suffering and help move them into treatment and sustained recovery.

We ask our peer recovery coaches to sit and deeply listen: to listen for change talk, to assess the person's recovery capital, to interface with physicians, therapists, police /parole officers. We create individualized wellness plans, hold our clients accountable and sit with them in their darkest hours.

We've worked hard to raise the level of professionalism in this field. Collectively, our single biggest challenge is acquiring and retaining staff. Low wages, no health care/vision/dental, no paid time off. That relegates most staff to work part time and cap their hours to stay on Medicaid. One of my best staff, capped out at the end of November, then worked the entire month of December as a volunteer so she could be there for our clients. That is the level of commitment!

We know recovery is possible-we each model it every day. To sustain this work we need your support. **I ask you to seriously consider our collective request for an increase of base funding for \$1.85 m and \$1m towards recovery housing statewide.**

Thank you.