



TO: House Committee on Human Services
FROM: Jenna's Promise
RE: Landlord-tenant law relating to certified Recovery Residences
DATE: 4/20/2024

Dear Chair Wood,

In lieu of providing testimony in person, **Jenna's Promise respectfully submits this written testimony in support of the language added to S.186 regarding landlord-tenant law as it relates to certified recovery residences in Vermont.** Jenna's Promise is a member of both VTARR, is the state's only level-3 certified home, and a member of Recovery Partners of Vermont (RPV). We fully support this language being added to S.186 as a legislative solution that provides for the safety and successful recovery of all residents.

As you know, there is a serious need for more certified residences in Vermont. We believe this language can help scale this critical resource by providing assurance that operators can meet their obligation to protect the safety and recovery of their residents. Although certified residences currently have policies and practices in place around the potential discharge of an individual, having this issue unresolved in legislation raises serious concerns for prospective operators who are committed to supporting people on their lifelong recovery journey. It limits who can be accepted into the program, and the state has witnessed prospective operators pulling out of their plans to establish more residences in Vermont because of *the possibility* of not being able to take immediate action if an individual in the home is puts at risk the safety or recovery of all residents. As many of you are aware- we are, all of us, in a race against time. There is a need to act, to help stem the overdose crisis that cuts short a heart wrenching 100,000 lives a year. Instead, too many able to help make a difference are stymied by the aforementioned issues and thus don't expand. It is our waitlist that expands instead.

Recovery residences exist to support people in recovery. Jenna's Promise was born out of the tragic loss of my sister to substance use. We know all too well that people suffering from an addiction need support. Recovery residences have been shown in the data to be one of the most successful interventions for those struggling with substance use disorder. Our model requires full participation in the program, of which housing is just one small part of the overall vision. Our thesis is that this will create far better outcomes for those fresh in recovery. Thus we have worked hard to cover people who often come into our system homeless, with no job, and no money—a complete inability to pay any rent or contribute financially. With no safe place to live, people new in recovery have an 85% chance of relapsing, returning to homelessness, the prison system, ERs, or—tragically—dying of an overdose. By the time people successfully leave our residential program, however, residents have full-time jobs and the skills to stay in recovery after taking our on-ramp back onto the highway of life. It's expensive work—our residential program operates at a loss of over 100,000 dollars a year—but without it, our outcomes would plummet.

We also fully understand the need to have a safe place for individuals to go if they relapse. Any individual who has a recurrence greatly benefits from a safe space with treatment services, which is why it is so important to also expand stabilization beds across Vermont. Residences only make up one component of the overall system of care, and the whole system cracks under the strain.

At Jenna's Promise, we have one stabilization bed on site for individuals who experience a relapse. The organization has an apartment set up for any individual who has a recurrence, where they stay for three days with the support of our professional staff. If use is stopped, then three days after their recurrence, they rejoin the recovery residences as well as our Intensive Outpatient Program, our Workforce Development Program, and our



Health and Wellness Continuum. We cannot ignore the fact that providing this level of service comes with significantly higher costs. Without greater financial support from the state, most certified homes simply do not have the budgets to implement this level of support. In fact, Jenna's Promise's residential program operates at a significant loss every year—a reality that our social enterprises are designed to help in part bear. This does not mean recovery residences are not adequate – every recovery residence in Vermont is critical for individuals seeking recovery. Every operator must be able to take immediate action when emergency situations arise.

What makes this issue so challenging is that the action of one can affect the recovery of all, but that does not mean the “one” does not deserve support. In our experience, operators of Vermont's certified homes go to great lengths to offer this support – often staying overnight in hotels or at stabilization beds with individuals to offer support and help. The experience of the residential team at Jenna's Promise highlights the critical need for structure, accountability, and behavioral support in someone's early recovery journey, when they are most at risk and most biologically and psychologically vulnerable. Although they are rare, there are instances where one individual's actions and behaviors put others at serious risk because the presence of drugs is a huge trigger for people who are working on stabilizing themselves. It is at this stage where they are most vulnerable and need the most support. We must be able to protect the overall wellness of the home, while at the same time exhausting all options to provide safety and continued recovery to an individual who is posing a risk or threat.

At their best, recovery residences offer some of the greatest evidence that recovery is possible, and that there is hope for those who struggle deeply with substance use disorder. At Jenna's Promise, we don't want free reign to do whatever we want—accountability is critical for these types of programs. But our recovery residences are more than just a home—they're just one piece of a tailored, in-depth program that wraps people in a behavioral, trauma-focused, and health focused system that looks to break the mold of the current model. If people are allowed to subvert the entire vision of the program, it leads to worse outcomes for everyone, including them.

Jenna's Promise remains deeply committed to its mission of providing comprehensive support to individuals on their recovery journey, and we are encouraged by the potential impact of the proposed language in S.186. By working together to address the challenges and barriers faced by recovery residences, we can create a stronger, more resilient system of care that truly meets the needs of our community. We appreciate the opportunity to share our perspective and insights.

Thank you very much.

Gregory Tatro
Interim Co-Executive Director, Jenna's Promise