

TESTIMONY of Jeff Moreau on behalf of the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences and Recovery Partners of Vermont regarding S. 186 - An act relating to the systemic evaluation of recovery residences and recovery communities

Dear Chair Wood and Members of the House Committee on Human Services:

My name is Jeff Moreau, and I have the honor of serving as the founding Executive Director of the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR). I sincerely appreciate the opportunity to address you today.

First and foremost, I want to extend my sincere appreciation for your steadfast support of our funding requests aimed at providing scholarships and operational assistance for recovery residences. Your endorsement, outlined in your budget memo, is invaluable to us.

As you are well aware from your dedicated work on this matter, Vermont is facing a severe shortage of quality recovery housing. These residences offer peer support, but also provide essential elements necessary for individuals to achieve sustained, long-term recovery. It is crucial to understand that recovery housing differs from treatment centers, medical facilities, or group homes. Rather, it emphasizes structure, accountability, employment, and community service, creating an environment free from alcohol and illicit drug use. Residents live together as a family, sharing meals, household chores, and activities, thereby nurturing a supportive community for one another. It is imperative that we make this resource accessible to everyone who needs it, but currently, there are not enough recovery homes to meet this need.

Prior to 2019, Vermont lacked any form of oversight or encouragement of best practices for recovery residences. In response, Recovery Partners of Vermont, Vermont Foundation of Recovery, and community stakeholders collaborated to establish a voluntary certification system based on the National Alliance for Recovery Residences. The coalition's primary objective was to embrace best practices and draw attention to the critical need for these recovery resources. VTARR emerged from this initiative, and I am immensely proud of the diligence exhibited by the 13 certified recovery residences across the State. We fully support the opportunity presented by S.186 to formalize these standards and extend our thanks to Senator Ginny Lyons for bringing this bill forward. We also

hope that this bill will help redirect the focus towards expanding this vital resource across the state, with the ultimate aim of establishing a recovery residence in every community that offers a recovery center.

Regarding Representative Steven's amendment being added to this bill, the current application of Vermont's landlord-tenant law presents a direct barrier to scaling this resource in Vermont. While we are strong supporters of tenant rights, a residence has an obligation to protect the safety and sobriety of all its tenants. This amendment addresses how to effectively ensure safety when an individual relapses or engages in behaviors that jeopardize the recovery and well-being of others in the household.

It is crucial to understand that recovery residences are transitional housing in nature. Most tenants stay for 3-6 months and sign membership agreements upon entry, including the promise to stay sober. This commitment is essential for the safety and recovery of all tenants within the home. In Vermont, operators are not always able to remove an individual if they break this component of their membership agreement, which can have devastating consequences for the rest of the tenants who rely on a sober environment to break free from their addiction.

Rep. Steven's amendment builds on legislation recently enacted in Maine, allowing recovery residences to exit an individual if the residence is certified and has an approved discharge policy. I want to emphasize that the use of this practice will be limited in scope and is only intended for individuals who refuse to work with the operator on alternative options during their recurrence.

I would like to set the record straight. No CERTIFIED recovery residence kicks a resident out to the streets. Each residence is already required to work with the individual on a person-centered relapse plan that documents where he or she wishes to go during a recurrence of their disease. Let me share with you how Vermont Foundation of Recovery, which operates 8 of our 13 certified homes, handles these situations, which mirrors practices of Jenna's Promise and the Second Wind Foundation.

Potential members are asked as part of the application process to list a safe place they can go to in the event they need to exit the home. We touch on this during the interview and again during the orientation process. We also have emergency locations in Essex and Barre that we provide in the event someone doesn't have a safe place to go. In addition, we provide transportation and have staff stay with the person until they are stabilized. If for some reason the emergency locations are not available,

we purchase a hotel room and pay for staff to stay with them until they can return to the house or identify another location to transition to.

We know that relapse is part of recovery, and any instance of relapse is managed with care and support. It is never the case that an individual is kicked out without the offer of support. This is a nuanced and often very complicated situation, as individuals also have free will and, no matter how hard an organization may try, there are times when a person refuses these supports and decides to leave. Or, the individual may be under the influence, refuse support, and refuse to leave. These situations are incredibly difficult, but again, they are always managed with care and support. Recovery Residence operators do not exist to hurt people who struggle with alcohol dependence and substance use disorder. They exist to help these individuals. While certified homes have established systems to support residents during recurrence, the State's work in creating stabilization locations is imperative.

Please keep in mind that recovery residences do not provide medical or treatment services, and individuals who relapse need these services.

I want to end by reminding you of testimony you heard on Recovery Day from Krista Chesebro. I am sharing a direct quote from her testimony that day:

I remember going to treatment for the first time in 2006....I felt amazing and was positive I would never go back to using. Within a few months I was back at it again. I was back to using drugs. This was what my life was like up until 2021. I would go to treatment, get off the drugs, feel better, go home, and then within a few months be right back where I started. Getting off the drugs wasn't the problem, it was staying off that was the problem. When my best friend died in May of 2021 that's when things became really real to me. I knew I had to do something different. I knew I couldn't go back home, or I would die. I got accepted to Jenna's Promise and arrived there August 4th , 2021. Having a safe place to work on myself was what I needed. It wasn't easy by any means, but it was what saved my life.

I welcome the opportunity to address any questions you may have. Warmly,

*Jeff Moreau, Executive Director
Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR)*