

I am here today to testify in support of the language added to H.639 regarding landlord-tenant law as it relates to certified recovery residences in Vermont. Please support this language being added to S.186 as a legislative solution to Vermont's landlord-tenant law that provides for the safety and successful recovery of all residents.

I am a Vermonter. Born in Bennington in 1956. I started drinking and using other substances in my teens. This continued through my twenty's and most of my thirty's. I had several interventions by family, friends and professionals during this time to try and help me recognize the damage my drinking was having on my life. This included detoxes and inpatient rehabs. In 1992 at the age of thirty six I had my last drink. I have had continued recovery from all substances since then and recently celebrated being clean and sober for thirty two years. One of the most important parts of being able to do this is being connected to others who have the same lived experience as myself. I have continued to be part of the recovery community in Bennington during this time.

I currently work as the Operations Manager at the Turning Point Center in Bennington Vermont. I started at TPC after retiring from the Bennington School/VPI in 2019 after 26 years. At Turning Point I began as a volunteer manning the desk and answering the phone to help those that were looking for support with substance use disorder. The Director then, approached me and asked me if I was interested in becoming a Recovery Coach. I was open to that and was sent to the Recovery Coach Academy in Burlington, Vermont. After my training and becoming a Recovery Coach I started coaching and helping individuals that struggled with SUD. Shortly after that training I was asked to go to the Emergency Department coach training. I completed that and finished orientation at our local hospital, SVMC.

My job there was to be on call during twelve hour shifts to assess those patients that were there because of possible SUDs. We spoke with those individuals and gave them options that they could choose for support if they wanted. This included detox, medication assisted treatment, intensive outpatient programs and inpatient rehab at Serenity House or Valley Vista. Along with those choices we also suggested to have a recovery coach assigned. We always stressed that regardless of any other choices for recovery having someone to talk and connect to is most important. The recovery coaches having lived experience along with their education and certification has been a plus for those we work with.

As I continued my work at TPC I saw the struggle some were having after completing an inpatient program and trying to stay clean and sober when placed back in the community they had used in. The overwhelming need to reconnect with those people they had used with was one of the biggest detriments to their recovery. We would guide them to start meeting people that were also in recovery and stay away from the old hang outs. This is much easier said than done especially when they may have to be staying with those that use because of housing concerns. Even those that had family that allowed them to stay with them struggled because of the mood swings and anxiety that come with early recovery. Those family members may love the member that is in recovery but without lived experience they do not have the understanding, patience and tolerance that are needed to help them.

I am also certified in Family coaching and working with those clients I can tell you that the impact that early recovery of a loved can have on family members is overwhelming. They will blame themselves for not understanding the process of recovery that their loved one is going through.

This leads me into the reason I am here today. I wanted to be able to explain as simply as possible the need for Recovery Residences in Vermont. Working and living in Bennington I must also mention that we have had no Recovery Residences here at all. When placing those looking for that I have had to use New Hampshire and northern Vermont for placements. I have been involved in advocating for Recovery Residences in Bennington for the last three years. I am grateful now to report that two Recovery Residences will be opening in Bennington this year. The women's residence is being opened by Vermont Foundation of Recovery and the men's residence will be opened by the Turning Point Center. Both these residences will be certified by Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences.

Jeff Moreau the Executive Director there has been involved with our process at Turning Point Center since we started looking at properties three years ago. His guidance and knowledge of Recovery Residences and their programming has been essential in our development of the men's residence. The policies and procedures that his organization has in place for certification has helped us develop a safe and accountable program for members, neighbors and staff. One of the most important policies in my opinion is the one that requires a safe and successful removal of a member that has caused the safety of the home or its other members to be in jeopardy. This might be a member who is engaging in violent, sexually harassing, or threatening behavior, or creating danger through the illegal use of drugs.

As part of the certification process we had to develop a plan for the safe and successful removal of a member. For our plan we have commitments from United Counseling Service, Bennington Rutland Opportunity Council, SaVida and Shire's Housing to be involved if necessary to help with support for the member being removed. We also have working relationships with both Valley Vista and Serenity House for treatment if that is necessary. Once the Operations Team decides removal is needed the protocol would begin. We, of course would hope that a return to the residence would be possible in the future for this member if appropriate. This option is always available for those committed to their recovery.

I want to thank you all for your time today and your continued help in developing safe and successful programming in Vermont for those affected by a SUD.

I am here today to testify in support of the language added to H.639 regarding landlord-tenant law as it relates to certified recovery residences in Vermont. Please support this language being added to S.186 as a legislative solution to Vermont's landlord-tenant law that provides for the safety and successful recovery of all residents.