

From: Maura O'Neill <mauraoneill@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, April 17, 2023 12:33 PM
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Subject: [External] Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform

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Dear Senate Appropriations Committee Members,

My name is Maura O'Neill, I am a third generation Vermonter who cares deeply about our little state. I am writing to encourage you to fund the \$150,000 ask from Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform.

While I have not myself been incarcerated or struggled with substance use disorder, I have family members who have, and I know how hard it is for justice involved people to gain access to treatment, recovery support, and housing. My sister struggled with opiate use disorder and I spent a significant amount of time essentially being a case manager for her so she had access to the basic necessities to live. Many, many folks do not have family who can do this for them.

VCJR does this work. They have a re-entry and recovery center for justice involved people who are at especially high risk of overdose death. Most of these folks have little to no support when re-entering our community, and accessing treatment, housing, and other support is incredibly difficult without a phone or transportation not to mention the stigma, fear, and shame this population faces.

VCJR has folks on staff with lived experience, and they are especially skilled at retaining this hard to reach population. In the six months their center has been open in downtown Burlington they have engaged more than 100 clients with ongoing case management, contingency management, re-entry, and recovery services. This funding would allow them to expand their capacity to take on additional clients, and continue their innovative services.

VCJR offers specialized services to the most vulnerable and high risk Vermonters. VCJR is the *only* program in the state offering contingency management, an evidence based drug treatment protocol, which has been named as a priority by members of the Opioid Settlement Committee members.

Over the last six months, I have had the honor of volunteering with VCJR, and have witnessed first hand the work they are doing. I am so proud of this program, and I know it is saving the lives of some of our most vulnerable neighbors.

I urge you to fully fund VCJR's request as I know they work with a very small budget, and the work they are doing is truly saving lives.

Thank you so much for your consideration, and please don't hesitate to reach out if you have questions or comments.

Best,
Maura O'Neill
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