

1 H.456

2 Introduced by Representatives Cina of Burlington, Christie of Hartford, and

3 Cole of Hartford

4 Referred to Committee on

5 Date:

6 Subject: Human services; Attorney General; corrections; reinvestment;

7 transitional housing; substance use treatment and mental health needs;

8 community support services

9 Statement of purpose of bill as introduced: This bill proposes to appropriate
10 various sums of money to the Agency of Human Services and the Office of the
11 Attorney General to establish and support a State-supported and community-
12 based continuum of care for justice-involved individuals. Specifically, this bill
13 proposes to appropriate monies to fund supportive and transitional housing
14 initiatives and community-based mental health and substance use services, and
15 to reappropriate funds for correctional facility construction to invest in
16 community-based services.

17 An act relating to establishing a State-funded and community-based
18 continuum of care for justice-involved individuals

19 It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

20 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

1 The General Assembly finds that:

2 (1) Social determinants of health and crime are interconnected and
3 impact public health and safety.

4 (2) Housing conditions are a key determinant of both health and crime.
5 The lack of affordable housing contributes to the extended incarceration of
6 justice-involved individuals beyond their minimum sentences in Vermont and
7 is linked to higher recidivism rates. Incarceration itself worsens these
8 conditions, negatively affecting public health and safety.

9 (3) Access to health care is also a social determinant of health and
10 crime. Justice-involved individuals suffer from higher rates of chronic health
11 conditions, infectious diseases, substance use disorders, and mental illness. A
12 public health approach focused on prevention and addressing these shared
13 determinants is essential for improving health and reducing crime.

14 (4) Education is a critical social determinant of both health and crime.

15 (5) Economic and social opportunities also drive both health outcomes
16 and criminal behavior.

17 (6) Incarceration often exacerbates social and economic harm and fails
18 to effectively rehabilitate individuals.

19 (7) Vermont can reduce criminal behavior by investing in housing,
20 education, workforce development, health care, nutrition, and mental health

1 services, offering community-based support to justice-involved individuals
2 instead of relying on incarceration.

3 Sec. 2. INTENT AND PURPOSE

4 (a) Intent.

5 (1) It is the intent of the General Assembly to reduce harm, restore
6 justice, promote recovery, and build resilience by delaying the construction of
7 new correctional facilities and prioritizing investments in social and housing
8 infrastructure.

9 (2) It is further the intent of the General Assembly to promote
10 transformative justice and recovery by providing housing and shelter for
11 justice-involved individuals alongside community-based support services.

12 (b) Purpose. The purpose of this act is to transform Vermont's criminal
13 justice system by reducing reliance on State-funded correctional facilities. The
14 act seeks to establish a community-based system of care and rehabilitation that
15 reduces recidivism and promotes recovery. The system will include:

16 (1) accessible, equitable, and localized services statewide;

17 (2) secure housing for individuals in recovery and those at risk of self-
18 harm or harming others;

19 (3) strengthened treatment, education, and workforce training integrated
20 into localized, equitable residential programs;

1 (4) pathways to economic security through fair compensation, financial
2 services, and opportunities for homeownership and small business
3 development; and

4 (5) support for healthy relationships to help individuals repair harm and
5 reconnect with family and community.

6 Sec. 3. APPROPRIATION; HUMAN SERVICES; JUSTICE-INVOLVED
7 INDIVIDUALS; HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

8 (a) The sum of \$1,313,044.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to
9 the Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of issuing
10 grants to Pathways Vermont to deliver supportive and transitional housing to
11 individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and who are being
12 released from incarceration or who were previously incarcerated.

13 (b) Any grant issued pursuant to this section shall be used to provide
14 supportive and transitional housing to individuals who are homeless or at risk
15 of homelessness and who are being released from incarceration or who were
16 previously incarcerated.

17 Sec. 4. APPROPRIATION; LAND ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITY

18 BOARD; JUSTICE-INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS; SUPPORTIVE
19 AND TRANSITIONAL HOUSING

20 (a) The sum of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
21 Land Access and Opportunity Board in fiscal year 2026 to issue grants to

1 community-based service providers for assistance with the purchase of real
2 property for the creation of supportive and transitional housing.

3 (b) The grants provided pursuant to this section shall be used by
4 community-based service providers to provide supportive and transitional
5 housing to justice-involved individuals who are experiencing homelessness or
6 at risk of homelessness.

7 (c) The Land Access and Opportunity Board shall issue grants pursuant to
8 this section to prioritize housing for groups who have been historically
9 disadvantaged, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of
10 Color; individuals with disabilities; individuals who are LGBTQ+; and
11 women.

12 (d) Any grant issued pursuant to this section shall also prioritize the use of
13 the Housing First model and the work of peer-based services and organizations
14 led by individuals with lived experience.

15 Sec. 5. APPROPRIATION; HUMAN SERVICES; JUSTICE-INVOLVED
16 INDIVIDUALS; HOUSING; SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL
17 HEALTH; RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT

18 (a) The sum of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to
19 the Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2026 to issue grants expanding
20 access to residential recovery facilities for substance use disorders and mental
21 health conditions.

1 (b) Any grant issued pursuant to this section shall be used to provide
2 supportive and transitional housing to individuals who are at risk of
3 incarceration, being released from incarceration, or who were previously
4 incarcerated.

5 Sec. 6. APPROPRIATION; HUMAN SERVICES; JUSTICE-INVOLVED
6 INDIVIDUALS; SUBSTANCE USE; RECOVERY SUPPORT
7 SERVICES

8 (a) The sum of \$250,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
9 Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2026 to issue grants to recovery
10 centers across the State.

11 (b) Any grant issued pursuant to this section shall be used to provide
12 recovery support services to those who are incarcerated or who were
13 previously incarcerated.

14 Sec. 7. APPROPRIATION; ATTORNEY GENERAL; JUSTICE-
15 INVOLVED INDIVIDUALS; COMMUNITY JUSTICE CENTERS;
16 RESTORATIVE APPROACHES COLLABORATIVE

17 (a) The sum of \$250,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
18 Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2026 to issue grants to community
19 justice centers across the State and to the Restorative Approaches
20 Collaborative.

1 (b) Any grant issued pursuant to this section shall be used to provide
2 restorative justice programs to those who are at risk of being incarcerated, and
3 those currently incarcerated or detained.

4 Sec. 8. APPROPRIATION; HUMAN SERVICES; JUSTICE-INVOLVED
5 INDIVIDUALS; COMMUNITY SERVICES; DESIGNATED
6 AGENCIES

7 (a) The sum of \$250,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
8 Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2026 to issue grants to designated
9 agencies for pilot programs in supportive and transitional housing.

10 (b) Any grants issued pursuant to this section shall be used to provide
11 community-based services to those who are detained, incarcerated, and who
12 have been previously incarcerated. Designated agencies shall use any grants
13 issued to support justice-involved individuals in maintaining housing and
14 recovery.

15 Sec. 9. APPROPRIATION; HUMAN SERVICES; JUSTICE-INVOLVED
16 INDIVIDUALS; SUBSTANCE USE AND MENTAL HEALTH;
17 OUTPATIENT SERVICES; PILOT PROGRAM

18 (a) The sum of \$1,000,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the
19 Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2026 for the purpose of establishing a
20 pilot program to provide community-based outpatient mental health and

1 substance use disorder services to detained or incarcerated individuals and
2 individuals reentering the community.

3 (1) Within correctional settings, a sufficient portion of any monies
4 appropriated shall be used to:

5 (A) reimburse community-based mental health and substance use
6 disorder treatment providers who serve detainees and incarcerated individuals
7 through telehealth or in-person visits at a correctional facility; and

8 (B) employ or contract with a case manager from a designated
9 agency who works both on-site and remotely across the continuum of care to
10 schedule mental health and substance use disorder treatment for detainees and
11 incarcerated individuals that:

12 (i) ensures privacy during telehealth or in-person appointments;

13 (ii) establishes a relationship with case manager in the community
14 prior to the detainee or incarcerated individual reentering the community; and

15 (iii) assists individuals reentering the community in applying for
16 Medicaid or procuring alternative health coverage.

17 (2) Within six months after an individual's release from detention or
18 incarceration, a sufficient portion of any monies appropriated shall be used to:

19 (A) reimburse community-based mental health and substance use
20 disorder treatment providers who provide telehealth or in-person visits prior to

1 the individual's Medicaid or other health coverage taking effect or in the event
2 that the individual does not have health care coverage; and

3 (B) employ or contract with a community-based case manager to
4 schedule treatment for individuals; coordinate transportation or information
5 technology connections for treatment; and provide continued assistance in
6 applying for Medicaid or procuring alternative health coverage.

7 (b)(1) In accordance with this section, community-based mental health and
8 substance use providers serving detained, incarcerated individuals, or
9 individuals reentering the community after incarceration shall submit
10 reimbursement forms to the case manager in the correctional facility or in the
11 community, as appropriate, using standard Medicaid billing codes. The case
12 manager shall remit the reimbursement form to the correct payer.

13 (2) The Agency of Human Services may support the operation and
14 administration of the pilot program described in this section through grants of
15 financial assistance to, or contracts for services with, a third-party that meets
16 the Agency's requirements.

17 (3) Any monies appropriated pursuant to this section shall not be used to
18 support the pilot program through the Department of Corrections' third-party
19 provider of health care services at Vermont's correctional facilities.

1 Sec. 10. CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES; MORATORIUM;
2 RESERVATION OF FUNDS; HOUSING AND COMMUNITY
3 SERVICES

4 (a) The Department of Corrections and the Department of Buildings and
5 General Services shall cease construction of new correctional facilities and
6 cease any expansion or renovations of existing correctional facilities until July
7 1, 2029.

8 (b) Any appropriations designated for construction, expansion, or
9 renovation of correctional facilities shall be reallocated by the Joint Legislative
10 Justice Oversight Committee to support transitional and supportive housing
11 initiatives, community-based mental health and substance use services, and
12 workforce development for justice-involved individuals.

13 (c) Annually, on or before July 1, the Agency of Human Services, in
14 collaboration with the Office of the Attorney General and other relevant
15 stakeholders, shall submit a written report to the Joint Legislative Justice
16 Oversight Committee detailing a plan to:

17 (1) monitor reinvestment efforts pursuant to subsection (b) of this
18 section;

19 (2) calculate any cost savings through the moratorium on correctional
20 facility construction in accordance with subsection (a) of this section and
21 reinvestment efforts pursuant to subsection (b) of this section; and

1 (3) analyze the efforts contained in this section and provide any
2 proposed legislation to reinvest in the community continuum of care.

3 Sec. 11. EFFECTIVE DATE

4 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2025.