

Lila Bennett

Executive Director, Journey to Recovery Community Center

Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee

Re: FY26 Budget Adjustment request for recovery centers

Hello Committee, thank you for having me here with you today. My name is Lila Bennett and I am the Executive Director of Journey to Recovery Community Center in Newport, Vermont. We are part of Recovery Partners of Vermont.

Last year recovery centers had a budget request of \$1.6million to maintain programming at our centers across Vermont. This request was built from the unique needs of each member organization, with local demand for services and geographic gaps in mind. We are super grateful to the Legislature and this committee for supporting \$800,000 in one-time dollars to support recovery centers in the FY26 Budget - These funds are imperative to our centers, and really to assist the health of the state of Vermont as a whole, for a number of reasons: we are saving lives in increasing numbers, year after year after year.

Recovery Partners of Vermont submitted recommendations for distributing the \$800,000, which had consensus from all RPV members. Unfortunately, the funds were awarded at a flat rate of \$50,000 across all recovery organizations, with the rest set aside to be allocated per Medicaid population maps. This disconnect between how we built our request and how the funds were allocated has left six recovery organizations in need of additional funding to preserve current services and to avoid significant deficits, including Journey to Recovery.

Today, we are asking you to please increase the one-time funding for recovery centers in fiscal year 2026 by \$420,000 to help support six recovery centers with budget constraints.

JTRCC was a staff of one in 2020, and is now a staff of eleven. We have two groups per day, averaging eight people per group. We have increased the number of people engaging in recovery coaching rapidly every year, with a 50% increase in adults and a 100% increase in students. We send people to treatment every week, an average of two new people per week to treatment. We have created a recovery community at the center, that welcomes people back after treatment and supports them in staying sober. We have expanded into sober living and supporting men truly healing, 24/7.

We are asking for your support to keep this hard work working. We are helping people return to the workforce and become taxpayers. Instead of repeat ED visits, repeat visits to treatment, repeated 911 calls for overdoses, we are actually seeing people achieve long-term recovery here. The word is out and we have new people, we have an average of five newcomers a week, engaging in our program. An increase in people served represents more people seeking services to stay in recovery and off substances.

There is so much need in the state of Vermont. That is why we are back asking for an additional \$420,000 in the Budget Adjustment to help six recovery centers facing budget constraints, which would get us to 75% of reported needs among RPV members for FY2026, which is pretty great.