

Testimony of Angelica Phillips House Committee on Human Services Regarding S.157: Recovery Residence Certification April 2026

Chair Wood and Members of the Committee,

My name is Angelica Phillips. I am a person in recovery and a former member of Vermont Foundation of Recovery (VFOR) in Essex Junction. **I am here today to speak in strong support of S.157.**

My perspective on this bill is unique. Before my own recovery journey began, my professional career was as a Regional Manager of an outpatient substance use program. I used to be the one creating guidelines and programming. However, my understanding of what makes a recovery program "work" changed completely once I walked through the doors as a resident.

In my professional life, I understood structure as a clinical requirement, but in my personal recovery, I realized it is a lifeline. Recovery is a lifelong process of work; it isn't a destination you simply "arrive" at. When you first enter recovery, your life is often in a state of chaos. Recovery residences provide the essential "new normal" through a framework of accountability.

This structure—regular meetings, shared household responsibilities, and clear community standards—is what allows an individual to begin rebuilding. It replaces the unpredictable nature of active use with consistency. In early recovery, you are still refining and shedding old behaviors; you need an environment that holds you to a high standard because, at that stage, you may not yet have the internal strength to hold yourself there.

For the home to be effective, it must be a sanctuary. When a housemate violates the community agreement—whether through a return to use, theft, refusal to engage in the program, or a litany of behaviors that impact others in the home, it creates a flood of confusing emotions for everyone else. You start to question your own safety. You worry about your belongings when you go to work. Most importantly, an unstable home environment becomes a direct trigger for your own recovery.

This is why the language in S.157 expanding grounds for exit beyond just return to use is so vital. Protecting the recovery and peace of mind of the rest of the community who are following the program is just as important as supporting the one who is struggling.

I have been in both positions, the one staying and the one needing to leave. While I did not choose to use the VFOR Safety Net Bed, one was available to me. I decided to use my Personal Safety Net Plan instead. This was hard but I did have a safe place to stay when I experienced a challenge that meant I could no longer stay in the home.

Now, because Recovery Residences operate within a mature system of care, re-engagement beds at Serenity House and Valley Vista are able to serve as the ultimate Safety Net Plan. This is what "grace" looks like in practice. It isn't just a second chance; it is a safe space where your sobriety is closely monitored, and you can address the root causes of your struggle.

The Committee has asked what it looks like to return to a home after an exit. In my experience, it is a structured process of accountability. It wasn't about just showing up again; it involved:

- Humbly "owning" the mistake and the impact it had on my housemates.
- Providing negative on-demand toxicology screens to prove my stabilization.
- Working closely with my House Coordinator to update my Relapse Prevention Plan.

This structure allowed me to return as a healthy, reintegrated member of the community.

In my professional life, I understood the theory of recovery. In my personal life, I lived the reality of it. S.157 provides the legal framework that allows organizations to offer this specific kind of grace—a system that prioritizes the safety of the whole house while keeping a door open for the individual in crisis.

I urge you to support S. 157 to ensure that others have access to the same safe, accountable, and supportive environment that allowed me to thrive.

Thank you for your time and for listening to my experience.