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**ORGANIZATION:** Vermont Foundation of Recovery and Recovery Partners of Vermont

**LOCATION:** Barre, VT

Good afternoon Madam Chair and members of the committee. My name is Candace Gale and I am from Barre, VT. I serve as the Director of Community Relations for Vermont Foundation of Recovery (VFOR).

VFOR operates nine certified recovery residences throughout Vermont. Our homes are certified by the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences and are part of a growing network supporting individuals in early recovery from substance use disorder.

Today, I want to share the impact we are seeing under Act 163, reflect on the statewide data, and offer a closer look at the lived experience of members in certified recovery residences.

Thanks to this Legislature's appropriation of General Funds and Opioid Abatement Funds, the FY25 State Budget supported the launch of four new certified recovery residences in Vermont. These homes brought an additional 40 beds online since July 1, 2024, expanding access to safe, supportive housing for individuals in recovery.

Across all certified recovery residences in Vermont last year:

- 226 individuals were served
- Every member received peer recovery coaching and was connected to a local recovery center
- The average length of stay was six months
- 63 percent, or 142 individuals, gained meaningful employment during their stay
- Of the 143 members who exited in 2024, at least 70 transitioned to a stable living environment

It is important to note that this exit data is likely underreported. Prior to Act 163, operators had no standard method for tracking where someone went after leaving a home. Even now, many individuals who move in with family or friends are not captured in the data, despite being in what we would consider stable living conditions. As we continue implementing Act 163, we look forward to clearer definitions and more comprehensive tracking.

Recovery is not linear. National research shows it takes an average of five attempts to achieve long-term sobriety. That context matters when evaluating outcomes. Every day spent in a recovery residence helps build recovery capital—offering structure, connection, and the space to rebuild.

Between July and December 2024, there were 40 temporary or permanent removals from certified recovery residences across the state. Of these, 27 were related to relapse and 13 involved threatening or violent



behavior. Behind each of these numbers is a coordinated response. At VFOR, for example, every member creates a Safety Net Plan when they move in. This includes identifying trusted contacts and steps for re-engagement if they cannot continue in the home. We go over the plan during a full orientation on day one and again after seven days to ensure understanding.

If a member does need to leave, whether due to relapse or safety concerns we act quickly to ensure they have somewhere safe to go. That may be a VFOR emergency bed, a stabilization bed, or a connection to their listed contact. Between July and December, 19 individuals statewide accessed safety net supports following removal. Discharge is not a closed door. Operators remain connected and help individuals find the right next step.

VFOR's structure, expectations, and peer-driven community are designed to support members from day one. This includes house meetings, accountability, drug screening, and personal growth goals. The goal is not just sobriety. The goal is to build the confidence, connections, and skills needed to live independently.

We are also working with the Fletcher Group to develop consistent data collection and reporting tools across Vermont's certified recovery residences. Jeff Moreau will speak to that work in more detail, but I want to underscore how foundational that will be for long-term policy and planning.

As we look ahead, we support efforts to codify certification and implement a fair, protective discharge policy. However, we must also address the serious barriers posed by current Landlord-Tenant law. Removing a member for relapse or violence is only part of the picture. There are other situations, such as repeated theft, refusal to engage, or consistent policy violations, that harm the wellbeing of others in the home.

Certified recovery residences operate on shared accountability and community norms. These homes are not traditional rentals. They are voluntary, structured environments where everyone agrees to uphold certain expectations. When a member disengages or disrupts that environment, it impacts the safety and progress of others. Operators need the ability to follow a certified discharge policy without triggering an eviction process that was never designed for this setting.

This is not about denying housing. It is about maintaining the integrity of the recovery model. Individuals who are not ready for recovery housing should be supported in accessing other options, not placed in a setting that relies on shared effort and commitment to work.

Recovery residences are not shelters or permanent housing. They are specialized, time-limited communities for people actively pursuing personal transformation. While some individuals experiencing homelessness may benefit from recovery housing, it is not the right fit for everyone. And without the ability to uphold expectations, recovery housing cannot be effective.



In closing, we appreciate your leadership and continued investment. The outcomes are real. People are working, reconnecting with families, and building the foundation for a better life. With thoughtful policy and ongoing collaboration, we can ensure more Vermonters have access to safe, supportive housing and a path toward long-term recovery.