Written Testimony on Emergency Rule 26-E03

Submitted to the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules -- October 9, 2026 (corrected version)

My name is Rory Van Tuinen. I'm a Vermonter in long-term recovery, I hold a certificate of attendance in Intentional Peer Support (IPS) training, and I'm co-founder of the nonprofit Cultivating Connections Vermont. I work alongside people navigating recovery, housing instability, and the systems that are supposed to help them. I'm writing about the emergency rule's provisions that would let abstinence-based programs count as viable housing for people with substance use disorder, and that would require housing plans to include mandatory services like medical treatment.

I want to speak to one principle: recovery has to be self-defined. That's not a slogan for me -- it's what my own life taught me. The path that worked for me won't be the path for everyone, and I don't pretend otherwise. But every version of recovery I've witnessed, in myself and in the people I work with, started the same way: with the person being treated as the authority on their own life.

Vermont's legislature already recognized this. In Act 143, lawmakers rejected mandatory treatment. This rule would walk that decision back through the side door -- making housing, the most basic foundation a person needs, conditional on participating in services they didn't choose. Housing is what makes recovery possible. It can't be the reward for complying with someone else's plan.

I'm also concerned about counting abstinence-based programs as viable housing for people with substance use disorder. For many of the people I work with, low-barrier options are the only door that's actually open. When the only housing on offer requires abstinence first, people don't get sober faster -- they stay unhoused longer. And staying unhoused is what puts people at the greatest risk.

I'm asking the committee to amend the rule so that housing plans offer services voluntarily rather than mandating them, and so that people with substance use disorder aren't counted as housed in programs whose abstinence requirements shut them out.

Thank you for your time and for the work of reviewing this rule.

Rory Van Tuinen

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