

**TO: SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE**  
**FROM: VERMONT CARE PARTNERS**  
**DATE: 4/16/2026**  
**RE: H.657 – DCF OMNIBUS BILL**

Dear Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

On behalf of Vermont Care Partners, I am writing to express our strong support for H.657, particularly the provisions that enable unaccompanied youth to access essential services without parental consent.

As a network of providers supporting Vermonters to access mental health, substance use, and intellectual and developmental disability supports, we work every day with young people whose ability to navigate daily life, engage in school, and participate in their communities is directly tied to whether their basic needs are met. For unaccompanied youth - many of whom are navigating homelessness, instability, or unsafe family environments - barriers to care are not just inconvenient; they are determinative. When access to health care, housing, identification, or financial systems is delayed or denied, the consequences compound quickly and can shape the trajectory of a young person's life.

The provisions in H.657 recognize a simple but critical reality: youth who are already operating without the support of a parent or guardian need a clear, lawful pathway to meet their own needs. Allowing certified unaccompanied youth to consent to care, secure housing, obtain identification, and access basic systems removes barriers that currently keep them disconnected from the very supports designed to help them stabilize and succeed.

From a provider perspective, this matters deeply. When young people can access mental health care, substance use treatment, and other supports without unnecessary delay, they are far more likely to stabilize, remain engaged in school or work, and build the foundation needed for long-term well-being. Conversely, when those pathways are blocked, we see young people remain stuck in cycles of crisis that are far more difficult, and costly, for them and for the State to address later.

What is notable about this section of the bill is that it does not create new complexity; it removes it. It aligns policy with the lived reality of these youth and gives them the tools to take appropriate, developmentally necessary steps toward stability. In doing so, it creates the conditions for meaningful change - both for individual young people and for the systems that serve them.

We appreciate the Committee's consideration of H.657 and urge you to support a bill that expands access, reduces barriers, and creates real opportunities for Vermont's most vulnerable youth to move toward stability and thrive.

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