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ORGANIZATION: Vermont Foundation of Recovery and Recovery Partners of Vermont

LOCATION: Barre, VT

SUBJECT: S.157 Testimony

Good morning, Chair Lyons and members of the committee. My name is Candace Gale, and I'm the Director of Community Relations for the Vermont Foundation of Recovery. VFOR operates ten certified recovery residences across Vermont, serving individuals in early recovery as they transition from substance use to stable, independent living. All of our homes are certified by the Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences (VTARR) and adhere to national NARR standards.

I am here today to speak in support of S.157 and to explain why the language in this bill is important for safety, recovery integrity, and policy alignment for certified recovery residences.

Certified recovery residences operate as structured recovery programs, not as traditional rental housing. These homes are built on accountability, peer support, and clearly defined expectations that protect both the individual in recovery and the collective recovery environment of the home. S.157 recognizes this distinction and provides clarity so these homes can function as intended.

Each year, as part of our certification and recertification process, VFOR is required to submit extensive documentation demonstrating compliance with national standards. This includes, but is not limited to, our mission and vision statements, proof of legal entity status and insurance, membership agreements, member applications and agreements, grievance procedures, medication and drug testing practices, relapse planning protocols, health and safety practices, personnel policies, background check policies, member rights and responsibilities, exit and transfer policy, substance use policy, prohibited items policies, good neighbor policies, and signed attestations and codes of ethics.

In addition to written policies, our recertification process includes annual safety inspections and recovery home walk throughs. As part of this process, the Executive Director of VTARR also speaks directly with members of the recovery home. These reviews ensure that homes remain safe, well maintained, and in compliance with certification standards, and that policies are being implemented consistently in practice, not just on paper.

This is not a light or informal process. Certification requires transparency, documentation, and ongoing oversight. These policies are reviewed annually, enforced consistently, and designed to ensure safety, fairness, and dignity for everyone living in the home. They also ensure that recovery residences are accountable to the communities in which they operate.



What S.157 does is align Vermont's statutory framework with this existing, well-regulated system. It acknowledges that recovery residences already operate under a comprehensive policy structure that governs entry, participation, accountability, and exit when necessary to protect the recovery environment.

It is important to be clear that this bill does not remove protections or eliminate accountability. Landlord tenant law continues to apply. What S.157 does is clarify how certified recovery residences can uphold their policies in limited circumstances where a person's behavior may jeopardize the safety or recovery of others in the home. Without this clarity, operators are placed in an impossible position, forced to choose between maintaining a safe recovery environment and navigating processes that were never designed for recovery housing.

When a relapse occurs, recovery residences do not act in isolation. Members are able to return to inpatient treatment when clinically appropriate, and VFOR works closely with treatment providers such as Recovery House and Valley Vista to ensure continuity of care. When a member returns to treatment, VFOR may hold that individual's recovery home bed, allowing them to stabilize in treatment without losing their place in recovery housing.

This coordination ensures that relapse is treated as a health issue, not a housing failure. The goal is always safety, stabilization, and connection to appropriate supports while protecting the recovery environment for all members of the home.

S.157 allows certified recovery residences to continue doing what they are already required to do, operate responsibly, transparently, and in alignment with nationally recognized standards, while protecting the integrity of recovery homes as part of Vermont's substance use system of care.

There are a two edits that we would like to see made to this bill:

1. In Sec. 3(b)(1), we see a need to add sections 4460 and 4464 to the notwithstanding language. By adding 4460, an operator can enter the home freely, which is sometimes important and necessary for safety reasons. Adding section 4464 protects operators from lawsuits when an individual is asked to leave, which aligns with the intent of this bill.
2. In Sec. 3(b)(D), we have concerns around the use of the words "provided or arranged for" alternative housing. When an individual is putting the health and safety of the home at risk, it is already standard practice to adhere to the resident's personal safety plan, which we require every resident have in order to enter the home. Plan A is always the individual's safety plan. If that option is no longer available, Plan B involves connecting an individual to a re-engagement plan at Valley Vista/Serenity House or the MH/SU crisis beds at our designated agencies. It is standard practice to rely on these options and operators do everything in our power to ensure that an individual's needs are met. And, individuals still



have free will. Operators cannot be held responsible if an individual refuses to utilize their personal safety plan or a re-engagement bed. People in early recovery live complex lives, and it does happen where an individual refuses the services offered to them. In these cases, operators cannot be held responsible to override the free will of an individual.

Thank you for your time and for your thoughtful consideration of this legislation. I am happy to answer any questions.