



Testimony to the Senate Health & Welfare Committee
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Thank you for hearing my testimony today on behalf of Vermont's peer-recovery centers. My name is Suzie Walker, and I live in Brattleboro. I'm a woman in long-term recovery, and it's my privilege to serve as the Executive Director for the Recovery Partners of Vermont.

RPV represents 14 peer recovery organizations across the state, including recovery centers and recovery residences. Our members provide top-caliber recovery supports for people in or seeking recovery, and RPV, the umbrella organization, provides member services including medical benefits management, advocacy, workforce development, EAP services, policy and compliance support, and more. We work closely with our partners at the Department of Health and our provider community. Our membership shares a vision and a strategy for ensuring that Vermont's certified recovery organizations flourish and help community members gain health and purpose.

We're tremendously grateful for the funding support the legislature has provided to ensure that our recovery service organizations can provide lifesaving services to our friends and neighbors. We're sensitive to how challenging this year's budget is and how difficult the choices are. We appreciate the thought and care our legislative partners bring to this complicated process. Knowing all of that, we're compelled to request that **\$800,000 be included in the budget to level fund the recovery centers.** That's how important it is to the health of our recovery center system and the Vermonters we serve.

This renewal would preserve current services at a time when recovery centers are facing increased demand. People in or seeking recovery benefit from recovery programs that provide access to services, and importantly, connect them with a community of people with lived experience who guide the way to healing and purpose. **The loss of this \$800,000 in funding would mean having to curtail services and downsize staff, threatening an already vulnerable situation.**

Recovery organizations have seen a significant increase in demand for our services, and we expect this trend to continue as federal actions make it harder for people who are struggling with substance use to access resources and services. Recovery organizations are also seeing an increase in the number of visitors who are accessing recovery spaces for more general support as other community partners and local agencies downsize or close. In particular, we have seen an increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness who access our space. We do everything we can to support any individual who comes through our doors.



As the former director of the Turning Point of Windham County recovery center, I know the impact peer-recovery support services can have on people and places. People become contributing members of their communities and families, and provide compassion and hope for others. One impact we see over and over in the recovery centers is that people who once accessed the centers for recovery support and resource connection become trained recovery peers themselves. Their lived experience with substances and with overcoming substance use and related problems provides a skillset and sensibility that no one else can offer. Their experience overcoming painful and seemingly insurmountable problems provides tremendous hope for program participants, and their insights help improve the system they now serve. Program participants become volunteers, trained peers, certified coaches, supervisors, and directors! The recovery system pays it forward in profound ways.

Recovery supports and services are the long-term solution for helping people realize the power they have to break free from their addiction. Peer support is a key element to the success of those supports and services. Recovery coaching is an effective service offered at centers and through center programs in the community—schools, treatment facilities, community-policing programs, and more. **Level funding would enable coaching programs to continue unabated and centers to retain their experienced, certified coaches.**

Continuing this essential work is why we're asking to level fund recovery centers with another \$800,000 in Prevention Funds, to be distributed according to the consensus recommendations of Recovery Partners of Vermont.

Thank you for your time and support.

Suzie Walker

Executive Director

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