

**Remarks of Vermont Lt. Governor Molly Gray
On Announcement of \$12 Million in COVID Relief Funding to VT
For Substance Use Disorder Treatment and Prevention
May 6, 2021**

Senator Leahy, once again you have put the needs of our small, rural state at the forefront. Your leadership on the opioid epidemic demonstrates your keen awareness of the challenges facing our state as well as your ability to do something about it. I know I speak for my fellow Vermonters when I express my deep gratitude for your work on substance use disorder treatment and prevention.

This latest round of funding builds on the funding you secured for critical research at the University of Vermont, and previously for communities to start life-saving treatment and prevention programs. You have put Vermonters at the forefront in addressing this crisis.

This crisis represents [a “twindemic”], a once in a life-time global pandemic on top of a persistent opioid epidemic in Vermont. As Senator Leahy mentioned, Vermont lost 157 Vermonters last year to opioid-related causes. Substance use disorder touches all of our lives in some way at some time.

My thoughts are with all of those brave Vermonters in recovery and maintaining treatment through the toughest of circumstances. We know that substance use disorder comes hand in hand with isolation. This pandemic has exposed and imposed numerous barriers to community-wide support systems vital to treatment and prevention.

Senator Leahy, Governor Scott and I have already discussed the importance of broadband funding and the need to fully connect every corner of Vermont. Treatment of substance use disorders is adversely impacted by persistent inequities in access to broadband making telehealth and virtual peer recovery programs, challenging. Even as we see our way out of the pandemic, broadband is necessary to ensure telemedicine and virtual recovery programs can remain a part of our efforts to support those with substance use disorder.

Through it all, treatment and recovery providers, as well as prevention teams, have worked tirelessly and creatively to maintain contact and services. Providers have been asked to do so much under unusually difficult circumstances. They deserve our every thanks and support. Eva, Monica, Cindy, Kate, Bob, Chief Peete, Dr. Levine – thank you for all the work you have done to help heal our communities, and for all the crucial work ahead.

This funding is an acknowledgement that Vermonters suffering from substance use disorder are seen and that their elected leaders are working to help. This funding, along with the American Rescue Plan funds coming to Vermont for broadband, will allow us to connect more Vermonters, particularly those in underserved communities, with urgently needed treatment and prevention services.

Once again, thank you Senator Leahy, we are forever grateful for your advocacy in Washington for the needs of Vermonters.

It is now my pleasure to introduce a woman who has worked tirelessly throughout this pandemic to expand access to affordable treatment, Eva Zaret who serves as the Central Vermont Prevention Coalition Coordinator.