



TOWN OF BENNINGTON

February 14, 2022

Rep. William Lippert, Chair
House Committee on Health Care

Re: Proposal to Expand Housing First Services in Bennington County

Dear Chair Lippert and members of the committee,

Please accept this letter of support in reference to Pathways Vermont's proposal to expand Housing First services in Bennington County on behalf of the Bennington Select Board. The Select Board has been in conversations with Pathways and local leaders, and it is clear this proposal would significantly and positively impact our community. Bennington County has one of the highest rates of chronic homelessness in the state and a disproportionate need relative to population size. There are approximately 70 households experiencing chronic homelessness in Bennington County, as documented by our local Coordinated Entry team. Expanding Housing First would enable the State to make a significant impact on the lives of people experiencing homelessness in Bennington County and on the overall welfare of the community.

Pathways Vermont is requesting \$390,000 from the legislature to expand its contract with the Department of Mental Health to expand Housing First services in Bennington County to meet this need. This expansion will allow Pathways to support an additional 30 households exiting chronic homelessness in our community. This investment would target households living with disabilities and significant mental health challenges who currently lack access to permanent housing. It would significantly impact the rate of chronic homelessness in our community, reduce the burden on our overtaxed emergency housing systems, and improve the lives of some of our most vulnerable community members.

Pathways Vermont has proven to be a successful and valuable partner having already supported moving more than 30 households, many of them families, out of homelessness in Bennington County utilizing CARES funding. Additionally, this year Pathways Vermont expanded its Department of Corrections project to Bennington to support individuals exiting incarceration and housing instability under the supervision of the Department.

Expanding Housing First would allow Pathways to replicate the very successful blended model of support that is currently operating in six counties across the State. This would provide parity for Bennington County and access to the unique and essential support of a Housing First intervention that Pathways provides, and which Bennington County urgently needs.

We appreciate the committee's consideration and are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely, on behalf of the Board


Jeannie Jenkins, Chair