

Memorandum

To: House and Senate Appropriations Committee

From: Tom Dalton , Executive Director, Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform

Date: February 8, 2022

Re: FY2023 Appropriations Request

Vermonters for Criminal Justice Reform (VCJR) is in the process of opening a specialized recovery center for justice-involved people living with substance use disorders. I was pleased to hear the Governor address the opioid crisis in his budget speech – and pleased to hear that he is recommending an increase in funding by \$8 million. We would like to see some of that funding go to this center.

Funding Request: We are asking the legislature to support an expansion of the recovery center network to include VCJR's specialized recovery center for justice-involved people at the same funding level as the other recovery centers in FY 23. We have made good headway in securing startup funds and anticipate opening our doors this spring, but sustainable funding will require that VCJR's recovery center be added to the base funding for recovery centers included each year in the legislative budget.

Need and Program Description: As we see in our work every day, justice-involved Vermonters are among the most affected by the overdose crisis, the COVID-19 crisis and the housing crisis. In response, VCJR is in the process of opening a specialized recovery center for justice-involved people living with substance use disorders. Our physical location will be in Chittenden County, but we will be working with justice-involved people statewide. VCJR recovery center staff will be available to communicate with incarcerated Vermonters in all Vermont correctional facilities and we will be working to help connect justice-involved people with their local recovery centers across Vermont.

Many justice-involved people experience especially complex recovery journeys and have important specialized recovery support needs. Only 5% of justice-involved people living with substance use disorders said they were currently accessing services at a recovery center. This specialized recovery center will provide this difficult-to-reach and difficult-to-engage population with a community setting, services and supports specifically designed for them. It will enhance Vermont's network of recovery centers by offering a community partner specifically focused on the needs of justice-involved people.

The attached program description provides additional details about how this new project will help mitigate the effects of the opioid crisis, the COVID-19 crisis and the housing crisis for this particularly vulnerable and stigmatized community (which includes a disproportionate number of BIPOC, low-income, and disabled individuals).

Finally, in addition to the attached, we are also working to address the fentanyl overdose crisis through a Contingency Management Program that we intend to operate through this recovery center. It is specifically targeted towards reducing fentanyl use. Including this evidence-based behavioral health intervention, studied and championed by researchers at the University of Vermont, will be an important component of our recovery center offerings.

Specialized Recovery Center for Justice-Involved Vermonters

VCJR helps individuals who are incarcerated or under community supervision live safe, productive and healthy lives. VCJR is working to enhance Vermont's recovery system of care by developing a **Specialized Recovery Center** to assist justice-involved people who are recovering from substance use disorder. Recovery center staff will be available to justice-involved people across Vermont. This includes individuals who are incarcerated in any Vermont correctional facility in order to facilitate transition planning, continuity of drug treatment and linkage to local recovery centers. Addressing unmet needs within this high-impact population will have profound benefits for justice-involved people, their children and families, and their communities.

Justice-involved individuals are among the most vulnerable and stigmatized people in Vermont and are among the most affected by the devastating cascade of crisis-level challenges facing Vermonters:

COVID-19 crisis: The COVID-19 pandemic is having a disproportionate impact on justice-involved people due to outbreaks in every Vermont correctional facility, a low rate of vaccination and limited opportunities to consistently comply with recommended mitigation practices.

Overdose crisis: The COVID-19 pandemic has significantly contributed to sharp increases in overdose deaths in Vermont - the largest increase in the country. The deepening overdose crisis is having a disproportionate impact on justice-involved people. The period following release from incarceration is a particularly high-risk time: drug tolerance is low, stress is high and many are not getting successfully linked to timely supports.

Housing Crisis: The housing crisis in Vermont is having a disproportionate impact on justice-involved people. Challenges include lack of a recent employment history, lack of a recent rental history, inability to pass a criminal background check and the imposition of justice-related housing restrictions (must live within a certain geographic area and must satisfy Vermont Department of Corrections residence approval requirements).

Services

The Specialized Recovery Center will provide both standard and specialty recovery services, including:

- Continuous case management and recovery support including during periods of incarceration
- Community reentry planning, coordination and support
- Support in successfully complying with legal mandates, including supervision requirements, treatment court requirements, protection orders, and sex offender registries
- Access to peer support specialists, peer recovery coaches and peer support groups with peers who have experienced both substance use disorder and justice involvement
- Overdose prevention
- Drug treatment options counseling, treatment coordination and treatment retention support
- Relapse prevention, relapse response, and recovery stabilization
- Support in accessing and retaining healthcare and following healthcare recommendations
- Parenting support and facilitating family connections
- Employment, job training and workforce development support
- Housing search and housing retention support
- Basic needs assistance (food, clothing, transportation, cellphone)
- Healthy community connection through volunteer opportunities