

As Vermont grapples with the unprecedented crisis of people grappling with substance use disorders, Recovery Residences are a key component of treatment alternatives. A 2019 report funded by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board identified, “Housing instability represents one of the greatest external hurdles to a recovery that is already inherently difficult.” This study identified the need for more than 1,000 additional beds, and communities from Bennington to St. Johnsbury are working hard to meet the needs of those grappling with substance use disorders.

The intent of H.783 is to expand the number of recovery beds available. This bill does not regulate all recovery residences in Vermont, but does propose for those homes meeting national standards certified by a Vermont affiliate of the National Alliance for Recovery Residences to be exempt from certain landlord and tenant relationships outlined in the bill and be zoned for single-family use.

With this certification process, the bill provides a toolkit for communities with state-wide definitions and detailed expectations and operational policies. Recovery residence operators are asking for this. Next, it addresses zoning for these homes as single-family residential use. This clarity is essential for both operators and communities and will eliminate barriers and discrepancies from town to town in relation to aligning with zoning regulations thus allowing homes to be integrated into our communities in proximity to transportation, employment, and necessary support services.

Guidelines and policies for temporary and permanent removal is also addressed to allow a fair due process for both tenants and landlords, balancing individual and community rights. Currently, no standards exist. Recovery residences for the most part do not consider their members' tenants. Under the bill, recovery residents are tenants – providing protections and standards.

Certified recovery residences will also benefit from being in this network, including technical support and guidance on best practices. Recently, the governor announced the formation of the Jenna Fund. This fund will be administered by Vermont Association for Recovery Residences and only be available to certified residences in the state. These funds provide initial deposits and first month's rent for individuals entering a recovery residence who have financial need.

This bill was developed with input from advocates, operators, state administrators from departments of health, housing, and corrections, as well as people grappling with substance use disorders. Site visits to South Burlington's Suburban Square women's home run by the Vermont Foundation of Recovery and Jenna's Promise in Johnson being developed by the Tatro family affirmed the benefits that these kinds of recovery residences provide.

This bill provides the necessary clarity that individuals with substance use disorders, operators, and communities need to move forward on standing up a safe, effective network of Recovery Residences across Vermont.

Witnesses

The committee continued to learn about the complex realities of recovery from advocates, operators, state administrators from the departments of health, housing, and corrections as well as people grappling with substance use disorders.

Testimony was heard from:

List of Witnesses: H.783 (Recovery residences)

House Committee on General, Housing, and Military Affairs:

1. Field Services Director, Department of Corrections
2. Senior Policy & Legal Advisor, Vermont Department of Health
3. Housing Policy Specialist, Department of Housing and Community Development
4. Two Legislative Counsels, Office of Legislative Council
5. Bill's Sponsor and Co-Sponsor
6. Coordinator, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition
7. Vice President of Government Relations and Community Outreach, Vermont Association for Mental Health and Addiction Recovery
8. Member, VFOR Transitional House, Essex
9. Executive Director, Vermont Alliance for Recovery Residences
10. Staff Attorney, Vermont Legal Aid
11. Executive Director, Downstreet Housing, Residences for Recovery Initiative and VTARR, Vice Chair
12. Self-Advocate, Newfane
13. Executive Director, Dismas House of Vermont
14. Executive Director, VT Human Rights Commission
15. Director, Vermont Apartment Owners Association, LLC