

Vermont Recovery & Opportunity Centers

A Regional Pathway from Crisis to Housing, Recovery, Skills, Work, and Community

Policy Proposal — Ben Bosley, Candidate for Vermont House, Chittenden-15

The Vision

Vermont has people cycling among homelessness, emergency rooms, shelters, temporary housing, behavioral-health services, substance-use treatment, correctional settings, and unemployment. These systems perform different and necessary functions, but navigating from crisis to lasting stability can require moving among numerous programs and agencies.

Vermont should create stronger bridges between them.

I propose establishing **Vermont Recovery & Opportunity Centers (VROC)**s: regional hubs that connect stabilization and recovery with education, skilled-trades training, transitional employment, permanent housing, and ultimately private-sector employment.

The principle is straightforward:

Meet people where they are. Help them stabilize. Help them develop. Create opportunities to contribute. Build a bridge to lasting housing, employment, and community.

The model would draw structural inspiration from Vermont's Northlands Job Corps Center in Vergennes. Northlands serves a different population—generally low-income young people ages 16–24—but demonstrates the value of bringing supportive community, education, practical occupational training, and career transition together. Northlands currently offers training in fields including welding, building construction, health care, and culinary arts, while Job Corps provides career counseling and job-search assistance as participants prepare to leave the program.

[Northlands Job Corps](#)

Vermont can adapt that basic concept to a different challenge: helping adults facing significant barriers move from crisis toward stability and opportunity.

1. Build on Vermont's Homelessness Response Continuum

Recovery & Opportunity Centers would **not replace the Vermont Homelessness Response Continuum (VHRC)** established by Act 143 in 2026. They would build upon it.

The VHRC is Vermont's new coordinated system for households experiencing or at risk of homelessness. It establishes different service levels based on household circumstances and uses case management and housing plans to address barriers to permanent housing. Its continuum

includes prevention and diversion, different forms of shelter, emergency hotel/motel housing, and eventually permanent supportive housing. Implementation is occurring in phases, with the remaining levels scheduled to begin later in 2027. [Vermont DCF](#)

The distinction is important:

VHRC creates a continuum of housing response. VROC's would add a continuum of human development and workforce opportunity.

VHRC asks:

What does this household need to prevent or escape homelessness and reach stable housing?

Recovery & Opportunity Centers would ask:

What does this individual need to address underlying barriers, develop capabilities, enter meaningful work, and achieve the greatest sustainable independence possible?

For many Vermonters, housing assistance may be sufficient. Others may face interconnected challenges involving mental health, substance use, prolonged unemployment, limited education, justice-system involvement, or the absence of marketable occupational skills.

Those individuals could voluntarily be referred from VHRC into a Recovery & Opportunity Center when more intensive support is appropriate.

VROC staff would coordinate with—not replace—the participant's VHRC housing plan and existing providers. As the individual progresses through recovery, education, and employment preparation, VHRC and community housing partners could continue working toward an appropriate permanent housing destination.

The result is a connected pathway:

VHRC / Outreach → Shelter & Stabilization → Recovery & Opportunity Center → Education & Skills → Transitional or Apprenticeship Employment → Private Employment → Permanent Housing & Community

Not every participant would need every step, and not everyone entering a VROC would necessarily come through VHRC.

2. Meet People Where They Are

Homelessness, addiction, mental illness, unemployment, and justice-system involvement do not have single causes. People experiencing these challenges therefore should not be forced into a single prescribed pathway.

Someone living outdoors with severe untreated mental illness and substance-use disorder may initially require intensive outreach, clinical stabilization, treatment, and supportive housing.

Someone in recovery may primarily need structure, stable housing, occupational skills, and help reentering employment.

Someone leaving incarceration may have employment skills but lack housing, transportation, identification, or a connection to employers willing to offer a second chance.

And someone experiencing relatively mild barriers may require only short-term assistance.

Recovery & Opportunity Centers should therefore operate on a **graduated model of support**, ranging from intensive stabilization to education, training, and career transition.

Depending upon individual needs, services could include behavioral-health and substance-use treatment; temporary or transitional residential support; primary-care coordination; recovery services; benefits assistance; education and GED preparation; financial and independent-living skills; transportation assistance; and individualized case management.

Employment would not be treated as a substitute for necessary health care. Training and work would become part of the pathway when an individual is ready.

3. From Stabilization to Skills

Recovery should lead somewhere.

Once participants are sufficiently stable and interested in employment, VROC's would connect them with occupational education, pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships, and other training based upon both individual interests and Vermont's workforce needs.

Potential pathways could include construction, building maintenance, weatherization and energy efficiency, electrical and plumbing trades, forestry and conservation, culinary work, health-support occupations, manufacturing, and other fields where Vermont employers need workers.

This would not require Vermont to construct an entirely separate workforce bureaucracy.

The Vermont Department of Labor already supports Registered Apprenticeships combining paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction, leading to nationally recognized credentials. Vermont is also currently funding efforts to establish and expand apprenticeship programs.

[Vermont Department of Labor](#)

Recovery & Opportunity Centers could become another doorway into that infrastructure.

4. The Green Mountain Conservation Corps: A Bridge to Work

For some participants, moving immediately from prolonged homelessness, recovery, or incarceration into conventional private employment may be unrealistic.

My proposed **Green Mountain Conservation Corps** could provide one voluntary intermediate pathway.

Participants who are ready could receive paid transitional employment while contributing to projects Vermont needs: trail maintenance, watershed restoration, flood resilience, invasive-species management, weatherization, parks and forests, community improvements, and other conservation and resilience projects.

The Corps would provide something particularly valuable to someone rebuilding a life: **a recent employment record**.

Participants could establish references, demonstrate reliability, develop workplace habits, strengthen occupational skills, earn income, and build confidence before transitioning into longer-term employment.

The objective would not be permanent government employment.

The pathway would be:

Stabilize → Learn → Work → Build a Record → Transition

5. Build a Bridge to Vermont's Private Economy

Recovery & Opportunity Centers should be designed with private employers, organized labor, training providers, and educational institutions at the table.

Regional employer advisory groups could include contractors, manufacturers, utilities, health-care employers, hospitality businesses, trade organizations, unions, and other employers experiencing workforce shortages.

Career counselors at each Center could help participants identify career paths, prepare résumés and interviews, obtain credentials, and connect with apprenticeships, internships, and permanent employment.

Employers could help identify the skills they actually need and recruit qualified graduates.

That makes the proposal more than a homelessness or human-services initiative. It is also a **workforce-development and economic-capacity strategy**.

Instead of asking only what a person experiencing homelessness, addiction, or instability needs from Vermont, we should eventually be able to ask:

What could this Vermonter contribute if we create a realistic pathway back?

Public investment can create that bridge. Private employment can provide the long-term destination.

6. Restorative Justice and Reentry

The same infrastructure could potentially serve appropriate participants involved with Vermont's criminal-justice system.

This would **not mean replacing accountability with treatment or employment**, nor would every offense or individual be appropriate for a community-based alternative. Public safety, victim needs, accountability, due process, and the circumstances of each case must remain central.

But where diversion, restorative justice, probation, community supervision, or reentry is appropriate, VROC's could provide another pathway through which accountability is connected with rehabilitation and reintegration.

Vermont already has substantial restorative-justice infrastructure. The Department of Corrections describes restorative justice as involving affected parties, requiring people responsible for harm to understand and take responsibility for it, make amends, and rebuild community relationships where possible. [Vermont Secretary of State](#)

Vermont also already funds transitional housing for people reentering communities from incarceration. DOC currently reports partnerships with 12 community providers providing approximately 243 beds or apartments and serving more than 400 individuals annually. [Vermont Secretary of State](#)

VROC's should therefore **connect existing restorative-justice, reentry, and housing programs to a broader education-and-employment pathway**, rather than duplicate them.

For appropriate participants, the objective becomes:

Accountability → Rehabilitation → Skills → Employment → Reintegration

7. Regional Capacity Without Recreating Institutionalization

Recovery & Opportunity Centers should not recreate the large, isolated institutions of the past.

The vision is a **regional network of appropriately sized programs**, integrated with local communities and connected to existing health-care providers, housing organizations, recovery

services, employers, educational institutions, municipalities, community justice centers, and workforce programs.

Not every participant would live at a Center.

Some could require temporary residential stabilization. Others could live in VHRC-supported housing, permanent supportive housing, transitional housing, or independently while using a Center for treatment, education, training, and employment services.

Regional capacity would also allow programs to develop areas of specialization while keeping people reasonably connected to the communities where they may eventually live and work.

Strong safeguards should accompany the model: participant rights, appropriate clinical oversight, evidence-based treatment, nondiscrimination, transparent eligibility standards, independent oversight, outcome reporting, and clear distinctions between voluntary services and any participation arising from a lawful court disposition.

8. Start With Regional Pilots and Measure What Works

Vermont should not attempt to build an expensive statewide system based only on theory.

Begin with a limited number of **regional demonstration projects** built around existing infrastructure wherever practical.

Establish measurable outcomes from the beginning.

Vermont should examine housing stability, employment placement, wages, credentials earned, apprenticeship participation, treatment continuity, program completion, returns to homelessness, and—where justice-system participants are involved—reentry outcomes.

The state should also measure **costs across systems**, rather than looking only at the VROC budget.

If a successful intervention reduces repeated use of emergency rooms, shelters, hotels, crisis services, corrections, policing, and other emergency systems while increasing employment and housing stability, those effects should be part of the fiscal analysis.

Likewise, if a component fails to produce meaningful results, Vermont should change or discontinue it.

Expansion should follow evidence.

Vermont Walking the Talk

Vermont talks about compassion, recovery, second chances, workforce shortages, stronger communities, and opportunity. Those values become meaningful when our institutions provide a realistic path for people to achieve them. Housing alone cannot treat serious addiction or mental illness. Treatment alone cannot provide someone with a home. Training alone cannot create stability for someone sleeping outside. And someone who has spent years disconnected from employment may need a bridge before a private employer can reasonably be expected to provide the final opportunity. We can connect these pieces.

VHRC provides a pathway from homelessness toward housing.

Recovery & Opportunity Centers provide a pathway from stabilization toward capability.

The Green Mountain Conservation Corps can provide a bridge into work.

Apprenticeships and private employers can provide pathways into lasting careers.

Restorative justice can, where appropriate, connect accountability with rehabilitation and reintegration.

Together, these pieces represent a different way of thinking about public investment—not simply managing people in crisis, but **investing in human capacity**.

The ultimate measure of success should not be how many services Vermont provides. It should be how many people are able to move from crisis toward **stability, recovery, meaningful contribution, permanent housing, employment, and the greatest independence they can achieve**.