

Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission

Year Six Findings and Recommendations

Prepared for:

**Clerks of the Senate and the House of
Representatives**

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

House Committee on Ways and Means

**Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use,
and Recovery**

Joint Committee on Health Care Financing

Prepared by:

**Middlesex County Restoration
Center Commission**

Supported by ForHealth Consulting™ at
UMass Chan Medical School

Chelsea Thomson
Health and Justice Policy Associate

Michael Kane
Senior Director, Criminal Justice Reform

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Report Overview</i>	5
<i>Commission Processes</i>	6
Commission Meetings	6
Commission Administration	6
Commission Activities	6
Guided and Supported the Procurement Processes	6
Identified and Operationalized Funding Sources.....	7
Visited Spaces to Inform Restoration Center Design.....	7
Engaged with Leaders and Stakeholders.....	8
<i>Work Completed by Vendors to Operate and Support the Restoration Center</i>	8
Vinfen	8
Restoration Center Location	8
Staffing	8
Clinical Specifications and Operations	9
Stakeholder Engagement.....	9
Service Provision	10
Knowledge and Best Practices Gathering	10
Health Management Associates (HMA)	10
Task 1: Facility Siting	11
Task 2: Community and Stakeholder Outreach and Engagement.....	11
Task 3: Sustainability and Funding	11
Task 4: Marketing and Communications	11
ForHealth Consulting	11
<i>Findings, Recommendations, and Implementation Timeline</i>	12
Findings and Recommendations	12
Implementation Plan and Timeline	12

Introduction

The Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission (Commission), established under Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018, *An Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform (Act)*, as amended by Section 142 of Chapter 126 of the Acts of 2022, *An Act Making Appropriations for the Fiscal Year 2023*, hereby submits its Year Six (November 2023 – October 2024) findings and recommendations to the General Court as required by the Act. The Commission has worked since its inception to do the following:

- Investigate the gaps and needs in behavioral health and diversionary services in Middlesex County that could prevent arrest and unnecessary emergency department (ED) utilization among individuals with behavioral health conditions.
- Develop a service model for a Restoration Center pilot program in Middlesex County and implement the program.

The Act tasked the Commission with planning and implementing "a county restoration center and program to divert persons suffering from mental illness or substance disorder who interact with law enforcement or the court system during a pre-arrest investigation of the pre-adjudication process from lock-up facilities and hospital emergency departments to appropriate treatment."¹ This report summarizes the activities completed in Year Six and includes an overview of the efforts to launch the Center.

ForHealth Consulting, the healthcare consulting and operations division of UMass Chan Medical School (UMass Chan), compiled this report on behalf of the Middlesex County Restoration Center Commission.

Commission members included:

- Middlesex Sheriff Peter J. Koutoujian, co-chair
- Dr. Danna Mauch, president and CEO, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, co-chair
- Senator Cindy Friedman, 4th Middlesex District
- Representative Kenneth Gordon, Middlesex 21st District
- Lydia Conley, president and CEO, Association for Behavioral Healthcare
- Scott Taberner, special advisor, Executive Office for Health and Human Services
- Nancy Connolly, assistant commissioner for forensic services, Department of Mental Health
- Deirdre Calvert, director, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

¹ Chapter 69 of the Acts of 2018.

ForHealth Consulting at UMass Chan Medical School

- Eliza Williamson, director of community education and training, National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts
- Chief Justice Paula Carey, Massachusetts Trial Court (Ret.)
- Chief Roy Frost, Billerica Police Department
- Audrey Shelto, president and CEO, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation

Report Overview

First, this report describes activities the Commission completed in Year Six, which include the following:

- Summary of Commission meetings held in Year Six
- Description of the work completed to launch and start services at the Restoration Center

Next, this report describes the work completed by:

- Vendor to operate the Restoration Center
- Facility siting and community engagement consultant

Finally, this report outlines findings and recommendations, which include:

- Pathways to include components of the Restoration Center within the Commonwealth's behavioral health roadmap
- Implementation plan and timeline for the Restoration Center pilot program

Commission Processes

This section describes the Commission's processes to support the launch of the Restoration Center.

Commission Meetings

In Year Six, the Commission met twice to:

- Receive progress updates from the selected vendor, Vinfen, on implementation of the Restoration Center;
- Discuss programmatic elements and provide feedback; and
- Brainstorm sustainability opportunities.

Commission leadership and Vinfen also met several times to share the status of the Restoration Center, identify potential challenges, and develop solutions on certain related topics.

Commission Administration

The state's fiscal year 2025 budget allocated funding for the Commission to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) line item 4000-0300. EOHHS continued to engage with ForHealth Consulting through an Intergovernmental Service Agreement to manage vendors to support and operate the Restoration Center, provide programmatic and policy guidance, and assist with the launch of the Center.

Commission Activities

This section describes Year Six activities for the Commission.

Guided and Supported the Procurement Processes

Supported by ForHealth Consulting, the Commission and EOHHS finalized the procurement for the Restoration Center pilot program vendor during Year Six by selecting a vendor and signing a contract in December 2023.

Restoration Center Vendor

By the deadline for the Request for Responses, EOHHS received a single complete submission. The response evaluation committee, comprised of Audrey Shelto, Chief Justice Paula Carey (ret.), and Scott Taberner, met to review and discuss the proposal and evaluate it against the criteria outlined in the RFR. Following review, ForHealth Consulting compiled the recommendation memo, after which EOHHS and Vinfen entered the contract negotiation and execution process.

EOHHS and Vinfen executed the contract on December 29, 2023, and work began shortly afterward, as outlined below. EOHHS, with support from the Commission, announced the news via a [press release](#) and the *Lowell Sun* [published a story](#).

Identified and Operationalized Funding Sources

During Year Six, Commission members continued to pursue funding opportunities to blend and braid funding for the Restoration Center. New funding sources identified and secured included an annual appropriation of \$1.5 million in EOHHS line item 4000-0300 into the Criminal Justice and Community Support Trust Fund in FY25.

In April, Vinfen submitted a \$1.5 million request for federal congressional directed spending to Senators Ed Markey and Elizabeth Warren, with letters of support from the Commission co-chairs. At the time of this report, that request is pending.

HMA, a project consultant, developed a sustainability plan to provide a roadmap of the potential federal, state, and philanthropic funding sources to sustain the Restoration Center. Vinfen reviewed the funding sources identified in the report to determine the viability and possibility of resources from the opportunities. Sources of potential funding in the report included the Behavioral Health Trust Fund, Opioid Remediation and Recovery Fund, Congressionally Directed Funding, SUD Federal Reinvestment Trust Fund, 988 Legislation, Medicaid 1115 Waiver Reentry Demonstration, Jail and Arrest Diversion Grant Program, Municipal Public Safety Reform Grant, Justice and Mental Health Collaboration Program, and Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals. Vinfen and EOHHS explored all options. The Department of Mental Health's Jail and Arrest Diversion Grant Program Request for Application includes police drop-off centers as an allowable project. However, project staff learned that this category was phased out on January 1, 2023, due to the launch of the Community Behavioral Health Centers (CBHCs).²

The Commission continued to identify and explore all funding sources to sustain the Restoration Center pilot program financially over the next three years. For the Sober Support Unit, one of the services without a dedicated and sustainable funding mechanism, Vinfen, EOHHS, and the Commission brainstormed options, including Opioid Remediation and Recovery Fund resources and a potential pathway towards third party payment via licensing. The Commission, EOHHS, and Vinfen continue to work closely to source, apply for, and secure funding to meet the identified needs of the Restoration Center.

Visited Spaces to Inform Restoration Center Design

In prior years, Commission members visited potential sites in the Lowell area, including sites at the Solomon Mental Health Center visited by Danna Mauch and Scott Taberner and the Greater Lowell Community Health Center toured by Senator Friedman, Sheriff Koutoujian, and Danna Mauch.

² Jail & Arrest Diversion Grant Program FY 2023 Annual Report. <https://www.mass.gov/doc/fy-2023-jdp-annual-report/download>

In February, all Commission members were invited to tour a potential site for the Restoration Center in Lowell. Sheriff Peter Koutoujian and Scott Taberner, alongside ForHealth Consulting staff and Vinfen, viewed the potential building location and discussed possibilities for the space.

After learning about the East Boston Neighborhood Health Center, Senator Cindy Friedman solicited interest from Commission members during the January Commission meeting to tour that space. In March, several members of the Commission, alongside ForHealth Consulting and Middlesex Sheriff's Office staff, visited the Health Center and discussed the similarities with the Restoration Center and lessons learned.

Engaged with Leaders and Stakeholders

In March, Sheriff Koutoujian and Chief Roy Frost facilitated a conversation with Vinfen and 10 police chiefs who represented police departments in the greater Lowell area to inform the group of the Restoration Center's goals, solicit feedback, discuss concerns, and brainstorm next steps to develop a law enforcement drop-off protocol. After the Restoration Center's Executive Director came on board, much of the engagement with local law enforcement and first responders transitioned to their portfolio, as described below.

Work Completed by Vendors to Operate and Support the Restoration Center

Vinfen

Following the contract execution in December 2023, Vinfen, EOHHS, and ForHealth Consulting met weekly—both virtually and in-person—to discuss Center progress, navigate challenges, engage with interested stakeholders, and brainstorm strategies to best serve the community.

Restoration Center Location

Prior to submitting their proposal in August 2023, Vinfen conducted a scan to identify potential locations for the Restoration Center in the greater Lowell area. After reviewing more than a dozen options, Vinfen identified one space that met the Restoration Center's needs, including appropriate space for service provision, feasibility of secure police drop-off without risk to other services or programs, distance from the CBHC and other critical service locations, and place within the community.

Once the contract between EOHHS and Vinfen was signed, Vinfen formally engaged in efforts to secure the building, which included identifying another tenant to occupy the square footage that would not be needed by the Restoration Center. After conversations with nearly a dozen organizations, Vinfen moved forward in partnership with a substance use treatment provider. Vinfen and its partner developed required construction plans in order to secure necessary approval and permits, and anticipates those approvals by early 2025.

Staffing

In April, Vinfen hired Joshua Nye, LMHC, to serve as the executive director of the Restoration Center. Joshua has worked in the mental health and substance use disorder field since 2010, primarily in the Merrimack Valley. Previously, Joshua helped develop the clinical component for the Supporting Transitions and Reentry (STAR) program at the Essex Sheriff's Office and most recently worked at the Charles River Community Health Center.

In anticipation of the opening of the Center, Vinfen developed recruitment, hiring, and retention plans and will begin hiring Restoration Center staff in 2025. In the meantime, staff from within Vinfen contribute to developing and executing the implementation plan for the Center, including leadership of peer-run and addictions service delivery models, experts in clinical practice standards within Massachusetts, and nursing and medical director expertise to ensure safety and efficient workflows for the Center when operational.

Clinical Specifications and Operations

Vinfen, alongside HMA, the MassHealth Office of Accountable Care and Behavioral Health (ACBH), EOHHS, and ForHealth Consulting, developed draft program specifications, informed by national best practices and standards, for the sober support unit. This support includes low-threshold beds available to individuals who use substances but are not ready for detox services. The group will use the pilot period to not only better understand who requests sober support services but also possible pathways for licensure or inclusion in other MassHealth service structures. Since signing the contract, Vinfen developed clinical workflows and processes for the Restoration Center, aligned with national best practices and local expertise internally and at ForHealth Consulting. Vinfen has periodically briefed Commission leadership on the progress.

Stakeholder Engagement

Vinfen launched the Lowell HUB/Situation Table in May as an upstream, integrated community-based response to individuals with high risks and convened more than 20 people representing more than 15 organizations.

To engage law enforcement in the development and implementation phases of the Restoration Center, Vinfen leveraged Chief Frost's role in the Commission to develop a strategy for engagement. The Vinfen Executive Director:

- Participated in "ride alongs" with the mental health clinician from the Billerica Police Department
- Attended roll calls to socialize the idea of the Restoration Center, gather insight and feedback, and learn about common challenges,
- Discussed the model with leaders and staff across police departments, and
- Provided an overview of the Restoration Center and associated services at a Middlesex police chiefs meeting.

In addition to relationship building with local police leaders and staff, the Executive Director also engaged in conversations with local hospitals and continued conversations with nearby ambulance companies to discuss the model and opportunities for coordination.

In June, Casa Esperanza hosted a Sequential Intercept Mapping exercise focused on substance use in the greater Lowell/Merrimack Valley area, bringing together stakeholders from various agencies, including Vinfen and EOHHS. During this activity, Vinfen had the opportunity to share more about the Restoration Center's work and its broader array of behavioral health services and strengthen connections and potential referral sources.

Service Provision

As part of Vinfen's CBHC model and a component of the Restoration Center continuum of care, Vinfen opened 13 Community Crisis Stabilization beds in April at the CBHC location.

In late May, Vinfen staff, as part of the Connections to Care team, began to provide services to individuals who self-identify as justice involved or experience risk factors closely associated with becoming justice involved—a target population to receive Restoration Center services. Services will be tailored to the unique needs of individuals and Vinfen will not verify justice system involvement with respective entities. These services are presently offered at Vinfen's CBHC but will eventually move to the Restoration Center once it is fully established. Through the Connections to Care team, care coordinators provide support to people in the Lowell area with mental health and/or substance use diagnoses by connecting individuals to timely and appropriate follow-up services outlined in an individual's treatment plan, arranging for services and transferring individuals to them, and enrolling individuals in longer term care coordination programs.

As one of the anchor components of the Restoration Center, Vinfen submitted a proposal to the Department of Mental Health in June for 10 respite beds within the Restoration Center facility and community-based mobile respite services to support individuals.

Knowledge and Best Practices Gathering

To help inform the service delivery model, ForHealth Consulting staff set up six calls between Vinfen and peers from similarly situated centers across the country to discuss best practices, obstacles encountered, and lessons learned.

To observe operations at similar facilities, Vinfen, EOHHS, and ForHealth Consulting staff traveled to Portland, Maine in June to tour the [Living Room Crisis Center](#) and discuss service provision with Center staff. The visit provided insight into the components that are similar to the Restoration Center, the lessons learned, and opportunities for improvement.

Health Management Associates (HMA)

As detailed in the Commission's Year Five Report, EOHHS procured HMA to serve as a facility siting and community engagement consultant to undertake the following tasks:

- Task 1: Manage the siting of a Restoration Center in conjunction with EOHHS and the selected Restoration Center vendor.
- Task 2: Conduct stakeholder outreach and engagement with community organizations, local governments, and residents concerning the Restoration Center.

- Task 3: Develop, in concert with EOHHS, a plan for sustainable funding of the Restoration Center beyond the initial three-year period.
- Task 4: Develop a communication plan, presentation materials, website, and logo for use by EOHHS and the selected Restoration Center vendor.

HMA began work in July 2023 and concluded its role on the project in June 2024. Once EOHHS and Vinfen signed the contract, Vinfen worked directly with HMA to tailor the remaining scope of work toward specific needs.

Task 1: Facility Siting

In Year Five and prior to the contract execution with Vinfen, HMA and its real estate partner, Savills, conducted a scan of commercial real estate that aligned with the RFR and Commission's specifications in the greater Lowell area, resulting in one potential site option. In their proposal, Vinfen identified another site via their internal scan of potential locations and pursued that option.

Task 2: Community and Stakeholder Outreach and Engagement

In support of this task, HMA conducted research around law enforcement drop-off best practices and policy considerations to help Vinfen and EOHHS facilitate consensus among law enforcement on drop-off processes and policies. HMA, alongside EOHHS, ForHealth Consulting, and ACBH staff, also participated in conversations with two ambulance companies local to the Lowell area to discuss the Restoration Center concept, current challenges, and potential areas for collaboration.

Task 3: Sustainability and Funding

HMA developed and shared a roadmap of resources for Vinfen and EOHHS that outlined the possible federal, state, and philanthropic funding sources to sustain the Restoration Center during and beyond the pilot period.

As described in previous sections, the sober support unit is one component of the Restoration Center that did not have an identified sustainable funding source. To help fill this gap, HMA, alongside ForHealth Consulting and ACBH, explored the possibility of aligning this service with a Department of Public Health Bureau of Substance Addiction Services license associated with sustainable funding via third party payors.

Task 4: Marketing and Communications

HMA provided communications guidance and developed a draft press release, talking points, and a Q&A document for Commission members and key stakeholders to use for the announcement of the vendor selection in January 2024. After this announcement, HMA continued to support the communications piece of the project by developing and sharing a draft site selection press release, potential logos/branding materials, and draft website content with EOHHS and Vinfen.

ForHealth Consulting

As part of the enabling legislation for the Restoration Center, an independent evaluator will conduct a rapid cycle evaluation of the implementation to inform improvements to the Center's model of care and demonstrate the impact of the Center's services and diversionary goals. EOHHS selected a team at ForHealth Consulting to undertake this task.

EOHHS, Vinfen, and ForHealth Consulting met several times to discuss data sources, a definition for a Restoration Center episode of care, and data elements/metrics. Given the compressed timeframe for implementation (12-18 months), the evaluation will primarily concentrate on descriptive statistics to reflect the utilization of services.

Findings, Recommendations, and Implementation Timeline

Findings and Recommendations

Throughout Year Six, the Commission, Vinfen, EOHHS, HMA, and ForHealth Consulting continued in-depth conversations about the services to be provided at the Restoration Center. One of the program pieces, sobering support services, would be a first in the Lowell region and reflects a new but emerging type of care across the country. The National Sobering Collaborative indicates there are over 70 sobering care providers in the United States and Canada.³ The voluntary, short-stay centers offer a safe place for people to recover from the effects of acute alcohol and/or other drug intoxication and research reflects promising outcomes.⁴

Vinfen, EOHHS, HMA, and ForHealth Consulting dedicated a considerable amount of time to learning about best practices, talking with experts in the field, and developing draft program specifications. EOHHS also worked closely with other state agency stakeholders to understand how this innovative practice could fit within the Commonwealth's behavioral health roadmap. These discussions focused on how the innovative services rendered at the Restoration Center could complement existing programs available within other treatment settings, including CBHCs. The Commission encouraged continued conversations on the potential for Restoration Center supports to be reflected across the Commonwealth.

Implementation Plan and Timeline

During Year Six, ForHealth Consulting supported EOHHS in hosting Commission meetings, managing a siting and stakeholder engagement consultant, procuring and managing a Restoration Center pilot program contractor, and providing guidance and support on programmatic, policy, and process pieces of the project and Restoration Center. ForHealth

³ <https://nationalsobering.org/directory/>

⁴ <https://www.statnews.com/2023/12/13/sobering-center-public-intoxication-drugs-alcohol-research/>

Consulting anticipates Restoration Center pilot program implementation on the following schedule:

January 2024 – January 2026:	Contractor readiness activities, including finding a location for a Restoration Center pilot program in Middlesex County, renovating the physical space in accordance with facility requirements, hiring and training staff, etc.
February 2026:	Launch date (estimated) of all facility-based Restoration Center pilot program services
February 2026 – June 2027:	Ongoing innovation and continuous quality improvement to measure outcomes, success in achieving specified goals, and improvement of the service model in collaboration between Vinfen, ForHealth Consulting, and the Commission
June 2027:	Recommendations to be made regarding the continuation and/or expansion of the Restoration Center pilot program