

TO: House Appropriations Committee

FROM: Barbara Rachelson, State Representative, Burlington,

RE: Recommendations to the House Appropriations Committee

DATE: 2/28/2024

Thank you for the invitation to come to the House Appropriations Committee today to share my recommendation.

I regret that I was unable to get there in time and appreciate the opportunity to share my recommendation in writing.

I write to strongly urge the House Appropriations Committee to support the Vermont Access Network (VAN) one time request of \$1 million of general funds to support Vermont's 24 community media centers. This is a one-time request that is extremely critical to keep the centers open as a permanent funding source is discussed.

I cannot tell you just how important these 24 community media centers are in providing Vermonters information and access to government information. While we have lost so many other avenues to staying current with what local government is doing, without as much newspaper coverage as we have enjoyed in the past, the VAN is needed now more than ever.

The community media centers provide Vermonters with access to live (and recorded) interactive public meetings, legislative coverage, and election results, which in itself is more than worth the \$ 1 million of funding.

Additionally, our community media centers provide people access to community events, local arts, and culture programming, as well as lectures and presentations, not only from people in Vermont, but throughout the country and world.

This fall, my district mate and I had our state treasurer come to Burlington to discuss Vermont's new retirement program. I was so grateful that our local community media center was able to come and record the event, as so many people wanted to be there, and for a variety of reasons, including one constituent who had a disability, was not able to attend. People were grateful for the chance to hear the Treasurer and get this information.

On another note, I teach a nonprofits and social change class at UVM. For the past two semesters, our local media center has hosted an intern. My interns have learned so much about media education, and how the local media centers work. The staff at our local media center has generously offered to help train other interns in the class working at other

nonprofits so that they could learn some great skills and help spread access of their services to other organizations and individuals.

In summary, the funding for the Vermont Access Network will go far in keeping our local democracy alive and well in our state, as well as to help preserve Vermont's local history.

Thank you for your consideration.