



Good morning, Madame Chair and House Committee Members,

My name is Gloria Quinn, and I serve as the Executive Director of Upper Valley Services. We are a Designated Agency dedicated to supporting over 250 individuals with developmental disabilities in Orange County and its surrounding counties. We operate three statewide crisis beds through the Vermont Crisis Intervention Network (VCIN) and two additional crisis beds, also shared statewide, through our Collaborative Crisis Program. Additionally, we support over 120 adults eligible for long-term nursing home care across Vermont through our Adult Family Care program, known as Vermont Comforts of Home. I am here today to discuss the critical importance of thoughtful implementation of conflict-free case management within the context of broader systemic changes in our state.

As we navigate through an unprecedented period of system change in Vermont, including the introduction of conflict-free case management, it is crucial that we view this initiative within the broader context of a provider system already stressed by significant staffing and housing shortages, as well as the daily system changes underway. These changes encompass substantial shifts such as the ongoing rate study, the implementation of alternative reimbursement rates, payment reform, a new standardized assessment process, and an interim quality service review process. While implementing conflict-free case management is a necessary step towards meeting federal requirements, it is vital that it is implemented thoughtfully to maintain the sustainability of support that people rely on. As a state, we walk a fine line between ongoing system changes and upsetting an already overtaxed system of care and services for people with developmental disabilities. Change is only beneficial when it sustains or improves rather than disrupts what already functions effectively.

At Upper Valley Services and across the provider network, our service coordinators are the linchpin in maintaining stability for those we support. These dedicated professionals are who people supported by our agency will call when under duress or needing assistance. These calls come at all hours day and night when help is needed such as providing support in the ED, sitting in at a doctor's appointment, helping to navigate a frustrating situation, or responding to a real or perceived emergency. These are daily tasks that, though sometimes seemingly small and less visible, have profound impacts on preventing crises and ensuring continuous support. In October 2023, a crisis survey indicated that 287 Vermonters with developmental disabilities were at risk of homelessness, with no long-term housing plans in place. Another recent survey shows that our UVS Shared Living Providers value and depend on the ongoing support, communication, and training provided by our agency and often through the current Service Coordinator role. Our service coordinators are crucial in navigating these and other social determinants of health that keep people stable. As we contemplate the integration of independent case managers and separate out duties between our current service coordinator roles and case management, it is imperative that we clearly define and respect the essential tasks and functions of service coordinators, ensuring that individual needs are comprehensively met.

It is necessary to also understand that the absence of affordable and accessible housing, as well as the extreme staffing shortages make it nearly impossible for agencies to effectively respond to and create solutions around destabilizing changes in a person's life. Examples of this may include a loss of a home provider and therefore built in support system, an aging parent who can no longer provide the care that one might need, losing an apartment due to the owner turning it into a lucrative vacation rental, a loss in one's family or friend network, a loss of a job, and the list can go on and on. Additionally, there is a higher level acuity for many people supported through our agencies. At Upper Valley Services alone, over 60% of those with developmental disabilities that we serve have cooccurring diagnoses, many of whom need wrap around supports in carefully designed and therapeutic support arrangements. It is critical that the support that people rely on for stability in their lives remain secure. Any significant upheaval could easily result in homelessness and loss of support. It would cost the state significantly more to replace what is the most cost-effective wrap-around support model through Shared Living.

Moreover, the ongoing changes in our system, from conflict-free case management to rate adjustments, call for a consistent level of collaboration between the Developmental Disabilities Services Division and service providers to ensure the greatest level of stability during already stressed conditions. To navigate these changes effectively, it is essential that providers are actively engaged in shaping the policies that will define our future operations and therefore ability to provide the ongoing services and supports that are critical to the health and welfare of each person we support. This collaboration will help mitigate potential disruptions and frankly, disaster, and ensure that the transitions enhance, rather than compromise, the support systems our community depends on.

In conclusion, while we stand in support of conflict-free case management and the positive intentions behind it, we advocate for its implementation to be part of a thoughtful, holistic approach to systemic change. This includes continued investments and commitment to sustain the current services and functions performed by our Service Coordinators beyond case management and in ensuring continuous dialogue with providers. It is only through such concerted efforts that we can avoid unintended consequences such as increased homelessness and service disruptions, which ultimately lead to higher costs and reduced quality of life for those we serve. Providers are hopeful that we may together proceed with a shared commitment to a stable, inclusive, and thoughtful evolution of our support systems in Vermont.

Thank you for your attention, your leadership, and your unwavering commitment to improving the lives of all Vermonters.



Gloria M. Quinn
Executive Director