

Hello,

My name is Donna Roberts and I live in Burlington. I'm a member of the parent-led Developmental Disability Housing Initiative (DDHI) that helped get Act 186 passed and which allowed the creation of pilot projects and grants to develop three (3) service-supported housing communities for our adult children with developmental disabilities like my 25-year-old autistic son Gabriel...communities intended to provide stable housing for our adult children with complex needs, who will need support throughout their lifespans.

That development funding for pilot projects was a good first step. But it was only the beginning.

Today, I write in support of **\$10.82 million to support the actual creation, building of pilot housing currently being developed as a result of Act 186**. The pilot and three associated grants only include funds for planning for three housing communities for our adult children. We need funds to build those communities and get them up and running. According to a 2023 report by the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, there are at least 602 individuals throughout the state in the same situation as our son.

Although this first grant for three supported housing communities is a fraction of what is required to meet the essential housing needs of the developmentally disabled population in Vermont, it is a crucial first step toward **developing a pipeline for funding the annual development of stable, service-supported housing for adults with developmental disabilities**.

Our children will never be able to live independently, and as such require extraordinary support from not only their families, but also the state. Our adult kids will never be able to fully care for themselves and advocate for their needs without assistance, support that ranges from higher level daily living skills like cooking, money management, and vocational support as in our son's case, to much greater daily physical assistance as is the case of many other Vermont families. We aging parents oversee most aspects of our adult children's needs. Yet, we are not the answer. We are aging out of our ability to care directly for our children. When we are gone or unable due to fully support our kids, when we have aged out as our children did when they graduated high school, our children have no stability.

The existing Shared Living Provider (SLP) model - whereby our adult children live with other families which earn a tax-free salary to house our children - is anything but stable. It is Vermont's foster care for developmentally disabled individuals. Unbelievably, it is the only solution in Vermont to house and support our vulnerable children. While that model does work for some, it provides no stability; SLP caregivers can terminate contracts when burnout hits, or our children's needs become too taxing for a variety of reasons. These one year contracts can easily lead to annual moves for people like my son who thrive on stability, familiarity, predictability.

Our adult children need access to stable, service-supported housing as exists in other states. My son, Gabriel, husband Chip, and I moved to Vermont from Pittsburgh, PA, in late 2019 for quality of life.

Despite Vermont's progressive image, care for the environment, its population in general and policies, it has been completely shocking to learn that the state does so little to support our adult children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Families are sacrificing

livelihoods, careers, retirement savings - often health - simply to help secure the basics for our "kids", things we all have a right to such as employment opportunities, but definitely most concerning, stable, supported housing for our loved ones. Our kids don't have access to the rights that other young adults and adults of all ages enjoy, including the ability to live with friends and peers. We just want Vermont to level the playing field for our kids, our families, like other states across the U.S.

In most other states, stable, supported housing options exist, the notion of "group homes" is accepted as a solution, not the taboo subject it is in Vermont. Gabriel was approved for permanent funding and a place in a supported group home in Pennsylvania for as long as his needs persisted. But group homes have not been allowed in VT since Brandon Training Center closed. For some reason that our families with adult children with complex needs cannot understand, group homes in Vermont have been equated to Brandon, considered institutions. That couldn't be further from the truth. Look at other states! Further, when Brandon closed, the capacity of communities across the state was to increase to support and integrate folks like my son, to help them lead full lives. But that has not happened.

While we are grateful for the Act 186 pilot projects and three associated grants - once the communities are built and functioning - they will still only house a small number of our loved ones, less than 40 people while the need is more than 600. And while the Vermont DD Council study was eye-opening, we know the actual need is much greater. This is the housing crisis of which few are aware.

Please, do your best for the most vulnerable Vermonters, and their families, their parents, who are doing our best to support our children in a state which is doing far less than most other states when it comes to serving developmentally disabled individuals. Vermont should be ashamed of its record and reverse this unconscionable situation as soon as humanly possible.

Please approve \$10.82 million in funding to build the community housing needed for the Act 186 pilot projects and simultaneously open a pipeline of ongoing funding for creating stable, service-supported housing for our adults with developmental disabilities.

Thank you for caring because we know you do.

Donna C. Roberts, MS