



STATE OF VERMONT
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MEMORANDUM

To: Rep. Diane Lanpher, Chair, Committee on Appropriations
 From: Rep. Theresa Wood, Chair, Committee on Human Services
 Cc: Rep. Jill Krowinski, Speaker, House of Representatives
 Date: January 25, 2023
 Subject: FY23 Budget adjustment recommendations

The House Committee on Human Services (Committee) thanks the House Committee on Appropriations for the opportunity to comment on the Governor's proposed fiscal year 2023 Budget Adjustment Act. The Committee's recommendations are outlined below:

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES (DCF)—ECONOMIC SERVICES DIVISION

Reach Up—B.323

The Committee remains concerned that the Department for Children and Families has not planned for potential increases in Reach Up caseloads for the remainder of fiscal year 2023. However, the Committee appreciates the additional funding for Reach Up in the proposed budget adjustment and requests, again, that the Department plan appropriately to fund this program in fiscal year 2024.

- The Committee supports the \$8.6 million for Reach Up caseload and \$1.1 million for the Lund Reach Up caseload.

General Assistance Emergency Housing—B.321

While the Committee agrees that housing individuals in hotel and motel rooms is not a long-term solution to ending homelessness, it believes that the March 15, 2023 termination date for the existing Transitional Assistance Housing Program and change in the adverse weather condition policy is ill-advised. Instead, the Committee proposes that the following language be enacted to ensure that eligible households with an individual who is 60 years of age or older, households with an individual who has a disability, or households with a child 18 years of age or younger be served by the Program through the end of the fiscal year:

Between March 15, 2023 and July 1, 2023, households that are otherwise eligible for GA housing pursuant to section 2652.3 of DCF's General Assistance rule (13-170-260) and that have an individual who is either 60 years of age or older, has a disability, or has a child who is 18 years of age or younger shall be eligible for temporary housing independent of maximum nights received or weather forecasts or conditions.

- The Committee recommends that \$13,424,710.00 is appropriated to ensure that the above populations are served by the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program through the remainder of the fiscal year.
- The Committee further recommends that \$2 million is appropriated for the purpose of hiring and retaining coordinated care teams to continue the wraparound supports needed for participants in the General Assistance Emergency Housing Program.

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES—CHILD DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Childcare Workforce—B.318

The fiscal year 2023 appropriation to the Department for Children and Families for workforce retention bonuses for early childhood providers to address emergent and exigent circumstances following the COVID-19 pandemic has faced obstacles in reaching the intended recipients. The Committee recommends allowing the Department to use a portion of the appropriated funds to provide technical assistance to child care providers in accessing these funds. The Committee is also supportive of the provision of technical assistance by a third-party partner.

The Committee supports the Department's request to move monies appropriated in fiscal year 2023 for the Scholarships for Prospective Early Childhood Providers established in 33 V.S.A. § 3542 to other grants, such as student loan repayment and current student scholarships, that were established by 2023 Acts and Resolves No. 45 using American Rescue Plan Act discretionary funds.

The Committee proposes the following amendments to the Student Loan Repayment Assistance program on an ongoing basis to expand the scope of eligible recipients and to allow for retroactive payments to providers who were eligible for a payment within the past year:

§ 3543. STUDENT LOAN REPAYMENT ASSISTANCE

(a)(1) There is established a need-based student loan repayment assistance program for the purpose of providing student loan repayment assistance to any individual employed by a regulated, privately operated center-based child care program or family child care home.

(2) An eligible individual shall:

(A)(i) work in a privately operated center-based child care program or in a family child care home that is regulated by the Division for at least an average of 30 hours per week for 48 weeks of the year; or

(ii) if the individual is an employee of a Vermont Head Start program that operates fewer than 48 weeks per year, work a minimum of nine months of the year, inclusive of any employer-approved time off;

(B) receive an annual salary of not more than ~~\$50,000.00~~ \$60,000.00 through the individual's work in regulated childcare; and

(C)(i) have earned an associate's or bachelor's degree with a major or concentration in early childhood, child and human development, elementary education, special education with a birth to age eight focus, or child and family services ~~within the preceding five years; or~~

(ii) have earned an associate's, bachelor's, or master's degree that contributes to an Early Childhood Career Ladder Certificate Level IIIB or higher through Northern Lights at the Community College of Vermont.

(3) To participate in the program set forth in this section, an eligible individual shall submit to the Department for Children and Families documentation expressing the individual's intent to work in a regulated, privately operated center-based child care program or family child care home for at least the 12 months following the annual loan repayment award notification. A

participant may receive up to \$4,000.00 annually in student loan repayment assistance, which shall be distributed by the Department in four allotments. The Department shall distribute at least one-quarter of the individual's total annual benefit after the individual has completed three months of employment in accordance with the program. The remainder of an individual's total annual benefit shall be distributed by the Department every three months after the initial payment.

* * *

(d) An individual who has not received student loan repayment assistance pursuant to subdivision (a)(3) of this section shall be eligible for a one-time retroactive payment of \$4,000.00 if the individual met all eligibility requirements within the 12 months preceding the date of application.

Children's Integrated Services

The Committee appreciates the intention to fund the increased Children's Integrated Services caseload with carryforward funds within the Department's Child Development Division. The Committee would like to ensure that the \$650.00 per member per month rate be paid for the entire caseload.

DEPARTMENT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES—FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

Secure Residential Stabilization Facility for Youth—B.327

In considering the Governor's budget adjustment proposal to carryforward costs from the Child Development Division to construct and renovate temporary secure residential stabilization facilities for youth, the Committee recognizes the need to rapidly develop a long-overdue alternative to crisis staffing. The Department's current plan is for one of the facilities to be on the grounds of an existing correctional facility. The Committee feels that the approval of these funds should be contingent upon a more complete plan for the location, including recognition that this is a temporary location (up to 6 years) while plans for a suitable location for a permanent facility are developed and the submission of a timeline for the additional stabilization and treatment unit plans. The Committee requests language that requires a more complete plan for the location, design, and budget of the units be submitted to the committees of jurisdiction prior to March 31,

2023. This item would also assist with bringing online two additional beds in cooperation with the Windham County Sheriff's office.

- The Committee conditionally supports the requested adjustment of \$4.6 million for start-up and construction costs.

Lund Center

The Committee believes that preventing the closure of the Lund Center is essential. Therefore, the Committee supports maximizing the number of families served by the Lund Center and closing the funding gap that currently exists until the PNMI adjustment takes effect. This will serve an additional 8–12 individuals currently struggling with substance use disorder and parenting.

- The Committee recommends a one-time appropriation of \$1.2 million for the Lund Center.

Foster Care System

The Committee is concerned with the fragility of the foster care system that could place the State's ability to serve at-risk youth in a dangerous situation if strong preventive interventions are not implemented. In contrast to virtually every other component of our health and child services systems, measures to retain foster families have been insufficient and have been severely stressed during the pandemic and by post-pandemic inflationary pressures. The Committee recommends that a one-time supplemental payment be provided to foster families in light of significant challenges they have faced due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It recommends a supplemental payment of \$500.00 per family per child for those foster parents who were actively caring for a child or youth as of January 1, 2023. According to the Family Services Division, there are 886 children currently in foster care.

- The total appropriation would be approximately \$433,000.00, depending on turnover.

DEPARTMENT OF DISABILITIES, AGING, AND INDEPENDENT LIVING (DAIL)

DAIL Administration—B.329

- The Committee supports DAIL's proposed request of \$1,085,720.00 of additional one-time funding for a skilled nursing facility high acuity contract. These funds will provide fit-up to begin to unclog the backlog of individuals in hospital beds who have been unable to move due to lack of capacity.

Supports and Services at Home (SASH)—B.330

- The Committee supports the fiscal year 2022 carryforward of \$568,182.00 from DAIL to SASH. This is the third year of a three-year commitment.

Developmental Services—B. 333

- The Committee supports both the ongoing appropriation of \$716,518.00 for the stability of Upper Valley Services' crisis bed system, as well as the one-time \$400,000.00 appropriation for the operational costs associated with the Upper Valley Services' crisis bed start-up.
- The Committee supports the additional appropriation of \$1,425,000.00 to address additional pressure in the public safety caseload for services to individuals committed to the custody of the Commissioner of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living. This will be an ongoing pressure into fiscal year 2024. This will serve five additional people.

Acquired Brain Injury Home and Community-Based Services Waiver—B.334

- The Committee supports the proposed budget neutral request of \$456,510.00 to accommodate the increase in utilization of services for individuals with an acquired brain injury. This will serve seven additional people.

Choices for Care—B.334.1

- The Committee finds the proposed use of Choices for Care funds acceptable. However, the Committee will have further discussions with the Department regarding the legislative intent behind and language in 33 V.S.A. § 7602 (calculating and allocating savings).

Adult Day Providers

- The Committee supports a one-time appropriation of \$2.1 million to the State's adult day providers to ensure they remain open for the remainder of the fiscal year and to increase participation throughout the State. A report is due February 15, 2023 to address an improved method to pay for this service. It is important to note that five programs have closed.

Low Utilization Payment Adjustment (LUPA)

- The Committee supports \$2,088,332.00 to increase the nursing rates for home health agencies to have Medicaid rates match LUPA at 100 percent. This is a critical need as the ability to recruit and retain nurses for high intensity services for home-based individuals is lacking.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

In response to the ongoing opioid overdose epidemic, the Committee recommends that the State continue funding the Substance Use Disorder (SUD) Specialist grant until the end of fiscal year 2023. According to the Department of Health, “SUD specialists are employees of the current Vermont certified SUD treatment network and provide screening, triage, initial information gathering, referral, crisis planning and consultation services to facilitate a seamless connection to evidence-based treatment, [Medication for Opioid Use Disorder], recovery supports, housing supports, harm reduction services, and other indicated prevention, intervention, or treatment resources.”

The SUD Specialist program is currently funded by SAMHSA’s “Emergency Grants to Address Mental and Substance Use Disorders During COVID-19,” and is scheduled to end on May 31, 2023. Since the beginning of the program in September 2020, SUD specialists have provided hundreds of consultations to Vermonters.

- The Committee recommends \$12,810.00 to fund the final month of fiscal year 2023 and allow for the possibility to consider extending funding in the fiscal year 2024 budget without an interruption in services.

OTHER

The Committee recommends an additional \$952,500.00 for the Howard Center’s Park Street Program for adolescent male youth with sexually harmful behaviors. The Park Street Program has operated in Rutland for 20 years, and the current landlord is planning to sell the property where the facilities are located. The purchase option for the Howard Center’s lease must be acted upon by April 30, 2023. The funds within this proposal include \$584,500.00 for the purchase price as well as \$368,000.00 for deferred maintenance and capital needs. This purchase option would lead the Howard Center to save \$150,000.00 annually in rent payments.