

Dear Committee Members and Colleagues,

We extend our gratitude for inviting the Brain Injury Alliance of Vermont (BIAVT) this invaluable opportunity to advocate for and represent survivors of brain injuries and their families.

At BIAVT, we are the sole organization in our state dedicated exclusively to providing comprehensive education, unwavering advocacy, and steadfast support to Vermont survivors of brain injuries, and their families. It is our commitment to serve individuals regardless of the type of acquired brain injury (abi) they may have sustained: be it traumatic or non-traumatic. We must underscore the significance of recognizing that not all brain injuries stem from trauma alone.

BIAVT aspires to evolve into a robust case management entity, one set to offer vital services to survivors in need. However, Vermont's overall shortage of case managers, compounded by a scarcity of expertise in this specialized field, presents a formidable challenge.

A notable problem arises from the current recommendations for Conflict Free Case Management, which dictates that BIAVT cannot provide Conflict Free Case Management unless we extend our services to encompass clients with developmental disabilities. This presents a highly nuanced dilemma, particularly considering the substantial volume of daily inquiries and referrals we receive. These referrals, requests for education, and communications, frequently originate from dissatisfied and overwhelmed/misunderstood survivors, or frustrated case managers, lamenting their inability to adequately address the diverse social, emotional, and behavioral needs of their clientele. Statements of "I just don't feel equipped to understand all of their needs" or "I don't have the time to babysit them" are common.

Survivors of brain injury often contend with emotional dysregulation, cognitive impairments, language processing issues, executive function challenges and a loss of social skills, which can lead to stigmatization as being a "difficult " client, or worse, leading to providers dropping them

from services. Moreover, a significant portion of this vulnerable population grapples with homelessness, lack of community and family support, poverty, and a daily bias from a “hidden disability” underscoring the imperative of flexible and compassionate service provision. A survivor of brain injury should never have to face statements of “you chose this and could work if you want to”, or “it’s just a simple form, anyone can fill it out” or a case note “denied due to raising voice at staff or crying extensively” (THIS is emotional dysregulation)

The success of our Neuro-Resource Facilitation (NRF) program, operational for less than two years, has shed light on the profound unmet need for case management services throughout Vermont. Our facilitators invest substantial time and effort with clients, exceeding the conventional limitations of traditional case management practices within Vermont. However, this endeavor has also underscored the deficiency in the capacity of many case managers within our state to effectively address the complex needs and comorbidities of survivors of brain injuries.

We have encountered assurances of readiness to "train" future Brain Injury Program Case Managers, yet we maintain reservations regarding the adequacy of such preparation. While technical proficiencies can be taught through conventional training methods, the nuanced understanding required to navigate the multifaceted challenges posed by brain injuries demands a more in depth and prolonged educational approach.

BIAVT has not been consulted regarding the development of training protocols for these prospective case managers. This oversight prompts us to question the efficacy and relevance of the proposed training initiatives. Our concern for survivors who often time are not able to find a voice for themselves, due to these daily challenges, MUST be heard. In conclusion, we implore thoughtful consideration of our insights and experiences as we collectively strive to enhance the quality of care and support extended to survivors of brain injuries and their families across Vermont.