

COVE Testimony, David Mickenberg, 2.21.14

Good Afternoon. For the record my name is David Mickenberg and I am here on behalf of the Community of Vermont Elders. I would like to highlight a few specific issues concerning the FY 15 budget.

First, COVE appreciates the 6 million dollars put into the LIHEAP budget by the administration and understands that the restoration of the sequestration cuts will bring the total for the LIHEAP budget to approximately last year's level. I would, however, point out that over the last few years the percentage of individuals total fuel needs covered by LIHEAP has continually gone down, making it more difficult for vulnerable Vermonters to heat their homes, an issue I would encourage the committee look at and consider how to increase individuals benefits.

Second, COVE is concerned about two things related to the FY 15 budget as it pertains to the Choices for Care program. First, we are concerned that the budget language included in the FY 14 budget has not been included in the FY15 budget, important language that sets parameters and focus on the issue of Choices for Care savings and reinvestment. Furthermore, we are concerned that as proposed the FY 15 budget uses 1.9 million in booked "savings" for nursing home under utilization for a statutory increase for nursing homes. COVE feels it is inappropriate to use this money in such a manner, and that by making the determination of the use of savings now it limits the flexibility for the legislature to make an ultimate finding of what level of savings exists and how that money should be used in the following budget adjustment. I would encourage the committee to closely examine both of these important issues concerning the Choices for Care program.

Finally, I would like to say that COVE supports the Long Term Care Ombudsman's funding proposal. This is a vital position that is important to the entire aging network and to countless elders throughout Vermont.