

**Date:** February 21, 2014  
**To:** Members, House Appropriations  
**From:** Ed Paquin, President, VCDR  
**In re.:** FY2015 DAIL Budget, SSP Services

### **Support Service Providers (SSP) for DeafBlind Individuals:**

VCDR is requesting that \$60,000 for SSP services be included in the DAIL budget. We believe that SSPs, individuals who are trained to act as links between persons who are deaf-blind and their environment, are essential to support the independence and community participation of individuals who are DeafBlind and other Vermonters with dual sensory loss.

The Vermont Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VCDHH) has received funding for initial administrative costs and the Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) has helped to train people to provide this service, but cannot provide direct services funding to the many Vermonters who would benefit.

This is proposed to address the problem of the negative consequences of social isolation experienced by DeafBlind Vermonters. Over 23 cities and states fund some level of SSP services to address the growing need for a specialized services for DeafBlind individuals.

The American Association of the DeafBlind(AADB) first used the term support service provider (SSP). SSPs are “volunteers who are trained to act as a link between persons who are deaf-blind and their environment.” (AADB 2006) In the past, family members often functioned as SSPs. Today individuals who are DeafBlind may be geographically separated from their families, and are also more likely to be participating in work, school, and community events that require access to professional SSP services.

The Vermont Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired both recognize the need for this service but DBVI is only allowed to fund SSP services for individuals who are eligible for their employment program. Lack of funding leaves many DeafBlind without access to basic transportation and communication supports.