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Outline of Testimony to the Vermont Senate Gov Ops Committee – January 7, 2014

By Tom Barefoot Co-coordinator Gross National Happiness USA and the Vermont Data Collaborative

- 1) The Vermont Data Collaborative is funded by grants from the Vermont Community Foundation and the main collaborators are GNHUSA, Benchmarks for a Better Vermont (RBA), Common Good Vermont, The Gund Institute for Ecological Economics (UVM), The Center for Rural Studies (UVM), and Building Brighter Futures. There are over 400 individuals and organizations who are part of the collaborators circle. The collaborative exists to bring people working with Vermont Data together to share data and collaborate on building datasets and dashboards and to help build a data informed culture for designing and managing public policy and service delivery to increase the wellbeing of Vermonters in our communities.

The collaborative supports the adoption of RBA, the GPI and Wellbeing surveys and increasing data literacy in Vermont. To this end, the collaborative is creating conferences, webinars and video training in support of the use of RBA methodology, GPI for macro economics, and Wellbeing surveys for development and data visualization and data literacy to assist agencies and NPOs to effectively communicate their stories using data. Measure what Matters. The collaborative is not the same as the Vermont Data Committee envisioned in the legislation creating the Vermont GPI. The VT Data Committee will be focused on maintaining and enhancing the VT GPI Data. The committee has held one preliminary meeting with many of the invitees also being members of the collaborative.

- 2) The Big Picture for Vermont

We see last sessions delay by the Gund Institute in delivering the VT GPI to be a blessing in disguise. This has allowed the legislature and the State and NPOs to focus entirely on learning and beginning to use RBA. If there had been two new data systems to learn, it would have been much harder. Amazing progress has been made with RBA with the legislature, the administration and with NPOs. Last winter's Common Good Vermont NPO conference focused on RBA and using data and was attended by over 240 Vermonters representing over 170 organizations. RBA offers a simple but very powerful model for measuring outcomes by looking to see if anyone is better off. The indicators for being better off can be subjective wellbeing or objective measures (lifespan). We believe that Wellbeing indicators can be used with RBA to measure the outcomes of policy or delivered services to provide us with the data to understand which services are delivering the bang for the buck. Measure what Matters.

The Genuine Progress Indicator in our view, provides a substantive improvement on the old Gross State Product by taking full account of economic costs and benefits plus environmental costs and benefits and social costs and benefits which are not currently counted in the GSP or GDP. GPI is a clear improvement in the State Accounts that will allow for better planning and show us whether we are making Genuine Progress or not. We believe that this session can continue to implement RBA and also learn to use GPI for providing the fiscal notes on key bills and beginning to replace GSP with GPI. We recommend that the state develop tech support perhaps at the JFO for committees or members that want to start using GPI.

- 3) GNHUSA hired the Center for Rural Studies at UVM to do a full telephone random Survey of Wellbeing and Happiness in Vermont. This study was completed in September and it shows that Vermont scores higher than the national average in 10 domains of wellbeing and will provide a baseline with which to compare community surveys. A preliminary analysis was released in October and a full report will be issued in the spring. GNHUSA plans to organize some communities around the state to do surveys in their area. Vermont is the first state to have a full baseline study of wellbeing like this which will allow comparisons with other states, cities and countries going forward.

We are working on a Wellbeing checklist for Vermont, which is tool for examining projected outcomes with the anticipated effects on wellbeing and happiness indicators in communities for a proposed policy. This is like the environmental impact studies now widely used – a happiness impact study with measurable indicators.

- 4) **Save the Date:** GNHUSA, the Happiness Initiative from Seattle and Santa Fe and the VT Data Collaborative will be hosting a **National Conference on Wellbeing and Happiness at UVM Davis Center on May 29-30, 2014 with 2 additional days of training and workshops on May 31st and June 1st.** This will include workshops on GPI, RBA and GNH wellbeing and how to use these tools for policy. People from many parts of the country see Vermont as a leader in adopting new indicators to guide policy and so we will hold our 3rd Bi-ennial Conference in Vermont with participants from Vermont and around the US and Canada.

- 5) Resources:

Santa Monica, CA has setup a Wellbeing Department to maximize wellbeing for their citizens. Watch a 2 minute video. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quAWRNiRKEg>

Data skills online video at CGVT with Amy Carmola and Lauren-Glenn Davitian
<http://blog.commongoodvt.org/2013/07/video-making-data-work-for-you/>

Presentation by John Hall of the UN Development Program on using data for policy
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5xcp68McTSw&feature=youtu.be>

Gross National Happiness USA Website www.gnhusa.org