



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND
WELFARE

MEMORANDUM

To: Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

From: Senator Claire Ayer, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Date: April 21, 2014

Subject: FY 2015 Budget Recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the Senate Health and Welfare Committee's recommendations on the fiscal year 2015 budget. The Committee has identified several issues that are priorities for us, outlined below.

Department for Children and Families: Reach Up

The Committee believes we have crafted a revenue-neutral proposal to increase the income and asset limits in the Reach Up program in order to provide incentives for Reach Up participating families to maximize their savings and earning potential and work toward achieving self-sufficiency. We expect to send you H.790, An act relating to Reach Up eligibility, shortly.

Department for Children and Families: Weatherization

The Committee strongly urges the Appropriations Committee to provide weatherization funding at the fiscal year 2013 level by increasing the appropriation \$2 million through an appropriate increase in the gross receipts tax on heating fuels. The Committee also urges efforts to further define the relationship between weatherization activities and savings in the LIHEAP program.

Department of Health: Public Health Dental Hygienist Program

The Committee supports expansion of the Public Health Dental Hygienist Program to enable dental hygienists to provide services in all 12 of the Health Department's district office WIC programs, as proposed in S.235, currently in the Appropriations Committee. The total cost of the program in fiscal year 2015 would be \$375,000, of which \$167,633 would be General Fund dollars and \$207,337 would be federal funds.

Department for Children and Families: Crisis Fuel Assistance

The Committee would like to see language providing the Commissioner of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) authority to issue a special "Warmth" grant for the 2014-2015 heating season if needed to ensure that DCF can help low-income Vermonters who are in a

heating emergency, meet the eligibility for Crisis Fuel Assistance, and have exhausted all other available means of assistance. The Committee also would like to see the DCF Commissioner granted authority to approve initial Crisis Fuel Assistance for a household that has applied for a seasonal fuel benefit but has not yet received it and is in danger of running out of fuel.

Agency of Human Services: Pathways Vermont

The Committee supports the request of Pathways Vermont for an additional \$800,000 to replace \$600,000 in expiring federal funds for this program, which services Vermonters who have experienced chronic homelessness and have mental health and/or substance abuse issues.

In addition to these priorities we strongly urge consideration of the following:

Department for Children and Families: 3SquaresVT – Hold harmless Vermont residents who received excess Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits through no fault of their own as the result of agency error.

Department of Health: Recovery Centers – Additional funding of \$300,000 is needed to maintain or increase staffing levels to address increased caseloads and ensure a full-time director at each recovery center.

Department of Mental Health: Youth in Transition Program – Additional funding of \$250,000 is needed to support opiate abuse prevention and related programs.

Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living: Choices for Care – Maintain language in the House budget, including allowing program savings to be used for quality improvement purposes in nursing homes but not to increase nursing home rates.

We also strongly urge support for affordable housing and homeless prevention programs as proposed by the Governor and supported by the House; including:

Temporary Housing Assistance: \$2.6 million for motel rooms for homeless Vermonters in catastrophic situations, vulnerable Vermonters, and under the cold weather exemption. We also urge eliminating or reducing the program requirement that recipients contribute 50 percent of their disposable income toward their emergency housing.

Vermont Rental Subsidy Program: Increase funding from \$500,000 to \$1 million.

Family Supportive Housing Grants: Increase funding from \$400,000 to \$600,000.

Community Housing Grants: Level fund at \$2.9 million.

Emergency Solutions Grants: Increased funding of \$300,000, from \$792,000 to \$1.092 million, using General Fund and federal Housing and Urban Development monies to pay for basic shelter operating costs such as rent, utilities, and staff salaries. \$200,000 of the increase is to make up for federal cuts; the remaining \$100,000 is for emergency warming shelters to reduce the need for motel vouchers.