

## Testimony for Public Hearing

Vermont Joint Fiscal Committee

February 18, 2016

Meghan McCormick

Champlain Community Services

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RE: FY'16 Budget Recession

Good afternoon Joint Fiscal Committee Members, my name is Meghan McCormick, I am a Senior Manager at Champlain Community Services (CCS), a Specialized Service Agency (SSA) in Chittenden County servicing individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism. We serve 85 people with complex needs, contract with 28 home providers, and have a staff of 55. We are a member of Vermont Care Partners and are designated to provide developmental services on behalf of the State.

First, thank you for the hard work you are doing. Vermont is known nationally for our Developmental Services System due to the work you've done alongside the care providers. The agency where I work – CCS - is known nationally for its innovative approach to supported employment - we have frequent inquiries from other states about our creative programs and history. Today I request the committee consider a **3% increase in funding to bring some necessary stability to this work.**

I am fortunate to be one of the people at CCS who hears the staff stories of progress and celebrations in their work. Together we creatively solve problems and improve the quality of life for the people we serve. Our agency is a wonderful community where we are proud of our work, and our workplace. Yet, *there is an increasing hardship that we face: with widespread effects to clients and staff, and it is why I am here today.* Over and over again, I meet with staff who face the difficult choice of staying at a job they love or leaving it for a higher paying job they don't want.

**Many of our staff have second and third jobs to make ends meet.** One staff we spoke to last week is working three jobs in order to keep this one, *the one she likes the most.* She says having three jobs makes it difficult to take sick time or vacation time, and she has to juggle which job she asks for time off to earn the most money. Without two other jobs, she can't make student loan or car payments (having a car is a requirement of the job) and she couldn't buy healthy food or medical care. She even said she was reluctant to tell us about changes needed for our consumers when it meant she might lose hours.

A man we support uses his earned money to pay for gas for his van for work and the community. **He has to earn his own money in order to go out – the waiver does not pay for his gas.** He has high needs and has had irregular staff; when they call out he can't work. Aside from the financial toll there are emotional and physical tolls to his lack of staff: his mood changes, he is more anxious, his medical issues escalate or new ones occur. A staff of his said: "We are not meeting our goal of community integration. This builds anxiety for clients and diminishes their skills, self -esteem, creates instability and overall emotional and physical problems."

Again this past Monday, a staff who is a single mom came to our office, nervous and embarrassed, asking for a loan for gas money in order to work. It's now common for staff to ask for loans for gas, food, or for repairs to their cars. She is working for us 25 hours/week. At her current wage, she is makes \$15,730 annually – **less than the federal poverty level for her family.** With the skills, the energy, commitment, trainings, screenings and care our staff put into this job, it is shameful *for us to be paying someone below the federal poverty level.*

We receive positive and regular feedback from staff who love the culture at CCS and want to do this work. *In fact, our exit interviews indicate that 100% of people who left voluntarily did so because of the low pay.* **We hire caring people who want to do this work, but can't afford to.**

With a **42% turnover rate** CCS is constantly interviewing people for positions. Unsurprisingly, *44% of people we did first interviews this year, didn't return for a second interview due to pay.* Because of the high turnover and open positions our Service Coordinators who cover people's programs must make hard decisions between supporting people vocationally, in the community, or with communication - because when we are understaffed it simply can't all be done. The quality of services is beginning to erode.

**I have seen the hours of thought and work put into making our budget efficient and accountable.** We deliver supports to people for their entire lives and at a very low cost. We support people in safe homes, make sure they receive regular health care, help get them jobs and allow them to develop communication and independence skills. There is no more money to save in Developmental Services. We scrape, save and reuse our resources and are at the point where the jobs we offer are no longer competitive.

**Our entire management team works overtime, nights and weekends, comes in on holidays, and works on our 24/7 on call team.** They support the direct staff and do the job of the direct staff when those that can't afford to do this work anymore leave. The direct staff are working several jobs to stay working at CCS. And, the consumers are safe, but lack access to work, communication and community because of constant staffing turnover. **We are at a critical point.**

I trust in the leaders of Vermont to make decisions that benefit the most people, show the high standards and ethics we take pride in, and to invest in our workforce. We welcome you to come to our agency to meet the wonderful people we support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Meghan McCormick