

Testimony: House Appropriations
Vermont Center for Independent Living
Sarah Launderville, Executive Director
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Good afternoon, my name is Sarah Launderville and I am the executive director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living. VCIL is a statewide organization and works with people with disabilities on goals of becoming more independent. VCIL is also a member of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights (VCDR). VCIL is a cross disability organization which means we serve individuals with any type of disability ranging from physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychiatric.

I wanted to comment on a few parts of the budget adjustment act. One specific is the Home Access Program which at this time has 124 people on its waiting list. We are appreciative of the \$206,000 from Choices for Care savings funding home access modifications which will allow approximately twenty people who have significant physical disabilities such as amputations and spinal issues; entrance and bathroom modifications allowing for them to meet their personal goals of greater mobility, self-care and employment.

The Budget Adjustment includes a \$10,000 reduction in a grant that provides peer to peer services. Since 1979, VCIL has been working with people with disabilities peer to peer meaning someone on staff who has a disability works with a person in the community who has a disability in meeting their independent living goals. This model has proven successful for people with disabilities receiving support in situations like transitioning from nursing homes or hospitals back into the community or working with veterans and farmers who are trying to understand and cope

with disability for the first time.

Peer Counselors help people with disabilities in our community on a wide range of issues including access to housing, support in identifying transportation options, helping families move through the education system and making social connections.

The \$10,000 translates into 667 hours of peer to peer services.

It can take up to 150 hours to help someone transition out of a nursing home and help ensure that the person is coming back to a home that meets all their needs.

A couple hours of support can translate into helping someone advocate to have an American sign language interpreter at their Doctor's visit or providing soft skill training for employment.

Some of the hours are spent on skill building workshops which connect attendees with other people who have disabilities while gaining additional skills. One skill training offered helps individuals develop emergency preparedness plans.

We also spend these hours on support groups where people with disabilities come together to talk and strategize about living independently and we have specialized groups for people who have traumatic brain injuries, youth and veterans who have disabilities.

We appreciate the \$10,000 will be covered through federal dollars that VocRehab has, but that in turn translates to a loss of services provided by VocRehab. It also puts additional restrictions on how that money is spent when working with peers. We will only be able to work with individuals who have "open cases" with VocRehab where many individuals coming to VCIL are not ready to work with VocRehab or have independent living goals other than employment. The reduction in state dollars also means less money will come into the state for VR services.

One trend VCIL has seen is an uptick of people with psychiatric disabilities who are homeless coming through our doors. We support the funding to Pathways to Housing. The need for

housing vouchers is great and we support the system that provides services in addition to vouchers that are essential for folks entering these programs to be successful.

We also have seen an increase in the amount of people applying for the Meals on Wheels program administered at VCIL which serves individuals who have disabilities, under the age of 60 and cannot prepare their own meals which is funded by state funds. We have just created a waiting list for new applicants to the program and have reduced the weekend meals portion of the program, meaning that individuals receiving MOW through this program, receive one hot meal per day Monday-Friday.

In reading the budget we see that the cuts in areas that stress underutilization of programs and we are not really able to understand those specifics at this time, so we are hoping the committee will dive deeper into those lines to ensure that families that include those who have disabilities, are receiving the supports they need.

Thank you for your work and hearing this testimony today. If you have any questions, please call or email.

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