



*Building a Safe Harbor for Vermont Elders through Advocacy and Education*

Good afternoon. My name is Gini Milkey and I am the Executive Director of the Community of Vermont Elders. I am here to speak on two specific budgetary concerns which could have significant impacts on elder Vermonters across our state.

First, COVE is increasingly concerned about the \$6 million cut to the LIHEAP program. Our concern is based on two specific issues. First, despite the Governor's representation that the \$6 million cut would be revisited prior to the heating season, as it has been in the past, we see this year as different. In recent years there were contingency funds set aside to address federal cuts, with a sense that some of that money would be used for LIHEAP if there were insufficient federal dollars. Given the budgetary constraints of the FY 16 budget, we are concerned that the money needed for this program to keep Vermonters warm and safe in their homes in the winter months will not be available. Second, if this \$6 million cut were not restored, we would be looking at an approximately 11% reduction in purchasing power for vulnerable Vermonters, a cut which would be devastating, and frankly dangerous for many.

The second issue COVE is deeply concerned about is the cuts to the Choices for Care program. We understand the difficult budget times and appreciated the Administration's efforts to keep CFC as strong as possible, as this program has been proven to be effective when properly supported. However, the proposed cuts to Adult Day Grants, and the significant cut to case management for people in enhanced residential care, are cuts that weaken the Home and Community Based system, a system that must be robust to allow Vermonters to age at home. These cuts to the Home and Community based system come despite a \$3.2 million increase for nursing homes, an issue that we urge the committee to consider as they examine the CFC budget and the prioritization within that budget. At a time when Vermont's population is aging faster than almost every other state in the U.S., we should not be cutting critical services that allow frail, low-income elders to age in the home of their choice at a lower cost to the state.

Thank you very much for this opportunity to share our concerns about the 2016 budget.