

Dear House Appropriations Committee Member,

I moved to Vermont as a young woman, at 21 years old, on my own because I believed in this place. I believed I could make a home here in our small responsible communities. I moved here from the South, when Jesse Helms was in the Senate representing NC, a state thought to be “progressive” for the south. It was a bad place to live for a woman.

And I did build a home here in this Montpelier community and built a family - birthed and raised my three children here – and worked hard here, putting my shoulder to many social causes.

I was serving on the Commission on Women when my second child was born. I started, and sold to Bell and Howell, a successful business, an entrepreneurs dream in my thirties. I’ve volunteered in violence response programs, worked on job programs for women in prison (Vermont Works for Women), and now struggle to advance disability rights with Vermont Center for Independent Living.

All of my 25 years here have taught me how intrinsically important it is for Vermont women to be successful here. When you impact women, you impact everyone. You mess with their kids, and wow, hell can break loose.

As I sat Thursday listening to testimony against the cuts proposed to child welfare (DCF) and preventative programs (Prevent Child Abuse VT), the Commission on Women, to people with disabilities through DAIL DDS, AABD Cola on top of the previous rounds of DAIL, VR, Department of Mental Health for VPS & Coalition, I find these proposals unacceptable, and frankly, stupid. The resulting losses will destroy us. When families’ basic needs are not being met and families are stressed, children suffer and children and women experience neglect and abuse. The programs being cut here serve women and children, many with disabilities, and predominantly the people who staff these programs – women, many the heads of

households -- will lose their jobs. Women and men who are Blind or mobility-impacted, or Deaf, or living with mental health conditions, continue to be grossly under employed. We cannot endure loss of services we rely on to work and access community supports. Twenty percent of us in Vermont are people with disabilities.

I am heart-sick that people representing me here -- people who I have worked so hard with on projects over the years to support at-risk women and families -- are making decisions to cut support in these ways. My soul has shaken more this week, than any other time in my life. I have less faith than ever, as we seem poised on the edge of true disaster.

Between the current cost of living for a working family in Montpelier, the extensive needs of one of my family members with a progressive disability, and now feeling like our state leaders no longer have our backs, I am leaving this state with my entire family. We are leaving Vermont defeated despite all we have each given of ourselves.

I encourage you to conduct a personal inventory and determine what ways you can be the change, the positive change, for the women of Vermont.

Kim Brittenham

Submitted March 12, 2015