

**January 20, 2016**

**Hello, I am Ed Paquin and I am the Executive Director of Disability Rights Vermont, a private non-profit that is designated to work with federal funding to protect and advocate for people with disabilities. We are also designated by the State as the Vermont Mental Health Care Ombudsman. We investigate abuse and neglect and work to address civil rights violations - and in doing so we see, every day, the effect that living in abject poverty has on many Vermonters with disabilities. For many who find themselves unable to earn a substantial level of support Social Security Supplemental Security Income provides at least a minimal sustenance, typically below the Federal Poverty level.**

**I would hope that Budget Adjustment could offer an opportunity to reverse the policy my colleagues have addressed today, a policy that will drive some of our state's poorest and least able-to-work citizens farther into poverty. Reach Up has seen a decline in enrolment that is projected to save over four million dollars in FY'16 and yet we seem comfortable reducing the benefits of households that**

**generally consist of a parent who is judged to be too disabled to work and dependent children for whom the state provides about ONE HALF of what those children need for sustenance. In these families the state already assumes that support of the disabled parent is through SSI and bases the Reach Up grant only on the number of non-disabled dependents. Compare this disability tax, which amounts to around fifteen hundred dollars a year to the impact you would see on an average earning family should they experience a similar rise in another tax, or a decrease in support from any other source through state action.**

**Legislators have a choice. We appreciate the difficulty of balancing a budget, but we hope that you remember that your actions can truly help people with disabilities to live decent lives or can exacerbate problems and drive them further into poverty.**