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House Appropriations

I'm Nicole LeBlanc from Montpelier and I am the Advocacy Director for Green Mountain Self-Advocates, a disability rights organization. I'm on the Autism Spectrum and I get Developmental Disabilities Services. I manage these services which enables me to work 30 hours a week and live on my own. I am here today to talk about the Governor's FY17 budget for Developmental Services and the impact of the Reach Up cut of \$125 a month for parents with disabilities who receive SSI.

First off, we are glad that there is new caseload and public safety dollars of about 7.9 million in the proposed budget. It is important to add new money for new services. Only 30% of the people eligible for Developmental Services actually get any services. Therefore, each year around 200 people experience some sort of crisis in their life and need to come into the system to get new services. Some are homeless because their parents are aging. Many face a health or behavioral crisis and their families can no longer take care of them. And some are youth coming out of high school who need support to keep their jobs.

And once they come into the system they typically need services for the rest of their lives. So the need for new money is real and it will go a long way to keep people facing a crisis safe and well cared for.

However, we are disappointed that there is no Medicaid bump or cost of living adjustment (COLA) for providers of Developmental Services. Annual COLA's are very important because many support workers don't make a livable wage. As a result of this, people with disabilities experience lots of staff turnover in their lives. Having staff stability is an important part of keeping people out of crisis.

Another concern we have is the \$125 a month SSI cut for Reach Up recipients with disabilities. While losing \$1,500 a year may sound like a drop in the bucket to some, for mothers with disabilities this means hard choices. It is important that during tough times we balance the state budget in an equitable manner. This cut is impacting around 800 of the poorest people in Vermont. Basically, our budget needs to make sure all Vermonters get what they need and give what they can. We strongly support the Repeal of this cut to Reach Up recipients.

In closing, we want to thank the legislators on this committee for the countless hours you spend listening to all of us and coming up with a budget.