



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: House Appropriations Services Committee (Rep. Johnson, *Chair*; Rep. Fagan, *Vice Chair*; Rep. Keenan, *Ranking Member*; Rep. Helm; Rep. Feltus; Rep. Hooper; Rep. Lanpher; Rep. O'Brien; Rep. Pearce; Rep. Toll, and Rep. Trieber)

FROM: Karen Schwartz, Executive Director

RE: SFY2015 Budget Adjustment

DATE: January 21, 2015

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the budget adjustment request made by the Agency of Human Services Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living.

VTDDC is vitally interested because we are mandated by federal law to act as an independent advocate and bring the voices of people with developmental disabilities and their families to the policymaking table.

When it closed the Brandon Training School Vermont made a commitment to support people to live in communities across Vermont with dignity and respect, and to help people be as independent as possible. You have struggled to maintain that commitment as the system of care for Vermonters with developmental disabilities has undergone six rollbacks over the last six years.

I am here to voice concerns about eliminating yet more funding from the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living [DAIL] due to "underutilization." Others will speak more specifically to concerns about losing \$1.2 million of family-managed respite funding that was intended to support families of children and youth.

It is hard to imagine how it was determined that \$646,497 could be cut as "underutilized", given that our system only provides home and community-based supports to about 21% of those eligible; there is a wait list of 302 eligible people who do not meet a current funding priority; and 118 families waiting for Flexible Family Funding that provides minimal help to those who do not get home and community-based service packages.

When I inquired I was told that only people who meet a current funding priority are deemed to need supports. That is circular reasoning. Funding priorities have narrowed drastically over the last 12 years, resulting in people with identified needs not being prioritized or served. For example, people who need help to prevent them from regressing physically or mentally are not prioritized and are therefore not considered to have needs. Nor are people over 50 who still live with aging parents

considered to have a need to have support to live in the community until there is an emergency i.e. their parent is incapacitated or dies.

Also, despite inflation, Flexible Family Funding – which supports families who do not get home and community-based services – was REDUCED from \$ 1300 maximum to \$1000 in 2010.

I ask that you get the facts behind the conclusion that the funding is surplus, and not needed. Find out how DAIL determines people's needs, and that they are being met. What services are people waiting for? What happens to individuals and families on the wait lists?

In closing I would like to emphasize that Vermont has come a long way in welcoming people with disabilities. We need to remember that all people count. It is a wise use of funds to ensure that people are treated with respect and dignity, and supported to be part of our communities. Their contributions enrich all our lives.

On behalf of individuals and families I would like to express appreciation for the support you have shown through tough times. Please consider the investments that you have made, and stop further erosion of this system of care.

Thank you for your consideration.