



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

Mailing Address
103 S. Main St.
Waterbury, VT 05671-0206

Phone 802-828-1310
Toll Free 888-317-2006
FAX 802-828-1321
vtddc@state.vt.us
www.ddc.vermont.gov

Temporarily Located at 322 Industrial Lane Berlin VT

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: SFY2016 Developmental Services Budget, Department of Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living

DATE: February 24, 2015

Thank you for this opportunity to speak about the FY2016 developmental services budget recommendation presented by the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living [DAIL].

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.

I am here to express support for two key components of the Governor's SFY2016 recommended developmental service budget because they ensure Vermont keeps true to its values and the commitment it made when we closed our institution, the Brandon Training School: to support people with developmental disabilities to live in communities across Vermont with dignity, respect and independence.

1. Caseload Funding for New People and New Needs. The developmental services recommended budget includes funding that values people by recognizing that, based on demographic trends, there are more people who have essential needs that must be met over the next year.

In point of fact, our system currently supports only 21% of those eligible under the state definition of intellectual disability. The recommended budget does not address needs of people who are eligible, but have not been prioritized or served due to the drastic narrowing of funding priorities over the last 12 years. 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. The SFY2014 Developmental Services Annual Report just released documents a wait list of 295 eligible people waiting for a range of home and community-based services, and another 36 families waiting for Flexible Family Funding that provides minimal help to those who do not get home and community-based service packages. (SFY2014 Annual Report at page 55).

Other witnesses will be testifying about the kind of crisis situations that trigger funding under current developmental service priorities. Fully 45% of eligible applicants in the past year did not meet a funding priority for services (Report at page 55).

In sum, the recommended new caseload funding is the minimum necessary to fund people who are eligible and meet current, restricted funding priorities for services.

2. Medicaid Rate Increase

Low Medicaid reimbursement rates have had a particularly negative effect on retention of direct support staff, as well as the ability of provider agencies to offer key positions like job developers that support people to move towards paid employment and independence. Since closing its institution Vermont has been able to serve people with developmental disabilities cost effectively, at an average annual amount that has stayed the same for the past 15 years, which is remarkable. See SFY2014 Annual Report at page 45.

The rate increase is long overdue, and is necessary for a stable work force able to provide quality services that value people and support them to live with dignity, respect and independence.

3. Initiatives to Reduce Spending.

The recommended budget also targets savings of \$1.9 million. DAIL's Commissioner testified that the target could be met based on underutilization; improved fiscal management; restricted priorities; and moving people into more independent housing, without negative impact on people.

VTDDC applauds efforts to support people to live more independently in the community.

Realistically new initiatives require an investment to ensure success. We also must take seriously the quality review situation outlined in the Annual Report at pages 50 to 51. Between 2000 and 2014 developmental service review staff was reduced from 12 to 4.5 FTE, while people in the system rose from 1,719 to 2,833. The system of care for Vermonters with developmental disabilities has also undergone six rollbacks to people receiving services over the last six years. In order to ensure that initiatives do not undermine services and impact people we ask that you require full and complete reporting back to the Legislature on the savings initiatives.

In closing I would like to emphasize that Vermont has come a long way in welcoming people with disabilities. On behalf of individuals and families I would like to express appreciation for the support you have shown through tough times.

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.

Thank you for your consideration.