

Vermont Center for Independent Living - Home Access Program  
House Appropriations Testimony - Feb 24, 2015

- Thank you for the opportunity to be here with you today and for your strong past support for the Home Access Program.
- My name is Patricia Tedesco and I live in Woodbury. I am the Home Access Program Coordinator at the Vermont Center for Independent Living, a new position to me after Joyce Werntgen retired at the end of last year. VCIL is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to the lives of Vermonters who have disabilities.
- The Home Access Program supports people who are in need of entrance or bathroom modifications in order to stay in their homes. Entrance modifications can include ramps, wider steps, and no step entrances. Bathroom modifications can include grab bars, pedestal sinks that wheelchairs can fit under, higher toilets and roll-in shower units. These modifications help Vermonters living with a permanent disability to live more independently and remain in their homes and communities. Some of those disabilities include osteoarthritis, Parkinson's disease, COPD, amputations, stroke, diabetes and spinal stenosis – to name just a few.
- The average cost of a home modification through this program is \$10,000, with a maximum, per person grant of \$15,000 compared to the \$97,000 a year cost to live in a nursing home.
- The Home Access Program currently has a waiting list of 116 people with a wait of about 2 years. We have 7 peers whose applications date back to the fall of 2012.
- Currently we have 56 projects – statewide – which includes 10 projects just started thanks to the additional Choices for Care money you approved through Budget Adjustment. These 10 projects are in Franklin, Windsor, Windham, Bennington, Caledonia, Orleans, and Lamoille counties.
- In addition to helping our peers, this funding has a trickle down effect. The contractors who work on these projects throughout the state are receiving livable wages. The contractors receive training and information from us about working with folks who have disabilities. They understand the importance helping fellow Vermonters gain more independence by having better accessibility.

- With the traditional annual Home Access Program funding levels of \$435,000 from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and \$100,000 from the Department of Disabilities Aging and Independent Living we are able to provide about 50 home modifications a year. Unfortunately, our waiting list continues to grow because we receive about 10 or 12 new applications each month.
- Because we rely on most of our funding from VHCB, I ask you to provide them with the highest funding level possible in the current fiscal environment. Please also support our annual funding through DAIL.
- On a more personal note, the first project I worked on from start to finish since I've had this job is a bathroom modification for a gentleman in Addison County – Whiting – who had managed to get volunteer labor to build a ramp, but still needed money for this bathroom modification. He has muscular dystrophy and lives along with an income of \$19,000 a year. Funding through VHCB made this possible.
- Also, this funding provided a bathroom modification for a 13 year old boy in Rutland so now he has the independence of showering on his own, rather than having his grandmother lift him in and out of their bathtub. These are real changes for real people.
- We appreciate your support of this important work. Thank you.

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