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Attention: House Human Services Committee

Re: Vermont Medicaid/DVHA Reimbursement Rates for Group Therapy Psychotherapy Services

Firstly I would like to thank for the opportunity to advocate for the needs of my clients. I am a Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor in private practice in Hardwick Vermont serving the needs of children, youth and adults with social emotional and behavioral issues. As a therapist I have been in private practice for 5 years, community mental health for two years. Previously I worked in programs for youth with social/emotional/behavioral challenges as a Special Educator.

I have facilitated a group once a week during the school year, sometimes twice a week on vacations and three times a week for one month of summer vacations. The importance of providing structure during vacations is key in a population that typically experiences regression without the structure of school and special education services. With the primary focus on developing social skills and communication the group introduces supportive structure into lives where structure may be compromised or absent. The groups have been effective across all the areas of focus, my clients have also developed skills they were often not aware supporting positive self-esteem and social skills. Often issues play out during the social context of group which provide unique opportunities to work with my clients' issues in a way that is vastly different to individual counseling.

Nearly all of my clients are on Medicaid and come from impoverished homes and are desperate for support services. Being in private practice I am financially responsible for the resources including adequate space, heating and therapeutic and intervention materials and tools. The cuts have drastically impacted my ability to provide this service to the extent that I am unable to continue facilitating groups.

The efficacy of group therapy is an established and proven mode of working with individuals with a diverse range of mental health challenges. I have heard from therapists in private practice and agencies expressing the untenable position these cuts have placed us in creating a situation in which it is financially impossible to continue providing groups. Of course the real losers are our clients who have expressed concern, confusion and disappointment as one of their key supports is cut. I also wonder how those mandated to attend group therapy will manage the changes.

I am also concerned about the long term costs to the community as services are cut and also the increasing support for medication as an alternative to efficacious treatments such as group therapy.

Once again I thank the House Human Services Committee for this opportunity.

Sincerely,  
Randy Bulpin  
LCMHC