

*Testimony for House Committee on Human Services*

*March 18, 2015*

*Taylor Terry*

*Champlain Voices, Champlain Community Services*

*512 Troy Ave, Colchester, VT 05446*

I'd like to start my testimony by quoting one of my peers, Bill Villemaire

"Our lives are enriched by our colorized future"

Hello my name Taylor Terry. I am the president of Champlain Voices a local self-advocacy group for people with developmental disabilities. We are part of Green Mountain Self Advocates. Green Mountain Self Advocates supports our efforts to take control of our lives, make decisions, solve problems, and speak for ourselves.

I am here to speak about Champlain Voices' concerns about the proposed budget cuts.

Let me tell you a bit about my life. I am fortunate to receive services from Champlain Community Services or as we say CCS. I recently switched from Northwestern Counseling and Support Services to CCS because of their Way2Work program and because they have access to a program that can help me get my own apartment which is my current goal. The amount of money I receive for support is minimal but I do a lot with what I have and know that any less would make my life difficult. I live at home with my family who cover 80% of my living needs. I attended Think College at UVM. Think College is a program that assists students with developmental disabilities in having a college experience. I graduated last summer. I now work independently at Price Chopper. I have been there 9 months working 5-10 hours a week. I am, also, as you know President of my local self-advocacy group called Champlain Voices. We have weekly meetings and once a month I attend the Green Mountain Self Advocates State Wide board meetings in Randolph. It is an honor to do this work and I feel appreciated for the skills I bring to the table.

Last week at our Champlain Voices meeting we invited our Director, Elizabeth Sightler, to talk with us. We talked about how we can be included in the

governance and strategic planning of CCS. We brainstormed ideas for a new mission statement and made a list of what's happening at CCS that's working really well. It included:

We get out into the community

We learn to cook

We're finding good jobs

We have a good board of directors we can talk with about any problems

We're educating the community about accessibility

And we write articles for DIY, our local newsletter.

We at Champlain Voices are in support of the Medicaid rate increase in the budget because it will support a pay increase for the staff that work with us. We know they don't make very much money. So what happens to many of us way too often is someone really great comes into our lives to work with us one-on-one, but then they move on to get a better paying job. This is not good for any of us so the increase will make a big difference in our lives and our staff's lives.

We are aware that there are increases to the developmental services budget but they are for people who will be NEW to services. We're concerned that proposed budget cuts take money from people like us who have already been receiving services, services that support us in all the ways we talked about at our meeting last week. I am someone who has experienced having my hours reduced. There have been 6 cuts to developmental services in the past 6 years. We don't want any more cuts that affect our services.

I'd like to end with another quote by Bill Villemaire

"We are at a place where we should build on our community skills."

Thank you for giving me time to talk with you about our concerns about the budget. I hope you will consider the impact the cuts could have on me, my fellow self advocates and our communities in Vermont.