



## Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: Senate Appropriations Services Committee (Senator Kitchel, Chair; Senator Nitka, Vice Chair; Senator Campbell; Senator McCormack; Senator Sears; Senator Snelling, Clerk; Senator Starr. )

FROM: Karen Schwartz, Executive Director

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

DATE: April 7, 2015

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments about the FY2016 developmental services budget 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 writing 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. We can unequivocally say that Vermonters are better off, living long lives as vital members and citizens of our communities.

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.

It is the bare-bones necessary to fund people who are eligible and meet current, restricted funding priorities for services. Since closing its institution Vermont has been able to serve people with developmental disability cost effectively, at an average annual amount that has stayed the same for the past 15 years. SFY2014 Developmental Services Annual Report at page 45. Full report available at <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Act-140-2014-DS-Report-CORRECTED.pdf>

At this point we only support 21% of those eligible under the state definition of intellectual disability. The budget as recommended 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. Page 55 of the Annual Report documents a wait list of 295 eligible people waiting for a range of home and

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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.

In the past year 45% of eligible applicants did not meet a funding priority for services (page 55).

Witnesses will be testifying about the kind of crisis situations that trigger funding under current developmental service priorities.

2. Medicaid Rate Increase 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. 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.
3. Initiatives that target \$1.9 million in savings. DAIL's Commissioner has testified that the savings 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 DAIL efforts that will support people to live more independently in the community, and that maximize use of funding.

At the same time we need to assure that the savings can actually be achieved in the face of 6 rollbacks over the last six years, totaling \$14 million, when people being served were cut to meet the needs of new people coming into the system.

In each rollback people lost supports that help them on the job and in the community; family caregivers and home providers lost respite hours; and key staff that helped people move toward independence like job developers were cut. People were moved into congregate day settings, and also wrap services, where the developmental home provider acts as employer and controls the budget for virtually all services, with minimal oversight.

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.

In order to ensure that initiatives realize savings, and do not undermine services and impact people, we ask that you require full and complete reporting back to the Legislature on the savings initiatives and their results.

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.