

Good Afternoon. My name is Erin Ward, and I'm a proud state employee who currently works for the Department for Children and Families in White River Junction.

I am also a Vermonter living with a disability due to a traumatic brain injury I suffered when I was just 12 years old. I have come a long way since that terrible day, and a lot of my success is thanks to Vermont's quality human services and the frontline workers who provide them daily. Thanks to all the help, this year marks my 23rd working as a state employee.

I come here today with two messages:

One, as a Vermonter living with a disability, I urge you not to make proposed cuts to essential services for the disabled, blind, deaf and elderly. I am living proof of all the good Vermont's public services are doing for these very deserving populations of Vermonters. These services have already

been cut to the bone, and more cuts will only result in more pain for Vermonters in need.

Two, as a long-time state employee, I urge you to reject proposed cuts to more frontline workers. Trust me when I tell you that in agencies and departments across Vermont, the negative impact from the last round of job cuts is still being felt. More cuts will make it even more challenging to provide the quality of services that Vermonters deserve.

Vermont tried to cut its way out of the last recession, and now here we are again, looking at another huge deficit and trying to cut our way out again. It doesn't work. Instead, lawmakers in this building must have the courage to seek new revenue, especially from those who have benefited most during Vermont's years-long recession.

I'll end by saying that Vermont needs a

long-term budget solution, not a continued reliance on service cuts or on state employees to keep giving back more and more of our negotiated pay and benefits.

Thank you for your time and for your leadership.