

Testimony on Governor's Proposed Budget FY2016 Hearing

Please accept this digital copy of testimony planned for Senate Appropriations Public Hearing to begin April 7, 2015 at 3:30 pm

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Regardless of how the bill is getting paid, it costs less to help a person do all they can for themselves, than it does to put people into an institution of any type. Most Vermonters who have disabilities make far less than the fifty thousand dollars which the state pays to hold people in places which are in fact "institutions".

The FY 2016 Budget reductions for VCIL include \$51,000 from the VR General fund. VCIL expects this will result in loss of services through our assistive technology and Peer Advocacy Counseling (PAC) programs impacting, at least 20 people and the loss of one staff position. Some of this can be replaced from federal funds but these moneys can be used only for youth in transition.

Peer counseling allows one person who has a disability to help another by working together toward independent living goals. This practice leads toward greater independence of the one seeking the peer counseling. What the peer and the counselor do really depends on the individual needs of the peer. For example, finding the accessible housing created through the efforts of the affordable housing providers, and learning what one needs to know to live there is something a "peer counselor" will do. Cuts to this program can only lead to higher costs elsewhere, and likely, poverty, in the future.

Transportation is also key to independence in people with disabilities' lives. Some people can't walk, others aren't allowed to drive because of their disability, and others have some very clear reasons why they can't drive their own personal vehicle. We

know the VR program for van modifications is being cut, and prior to cuts, it only funded 2 or 3 vans a year for people who are working. There has never been a Vermont fund for van modification needs of families with children or seniors not working. VCIL knows students and many families who use wheelchairs really need assistance with this expense - \$10 to 15,000 per vehicle modification. Cuts and no new funding limit both opportunities and choices for people who need their own personal transportation in our rural state.

Department of Mental Health reductions mean a loss of \$20,000 to VCIL's Wellness Workforce Coalition. Coalition members like Vermont Psychiatric Survivors (VPS), are being cut even more. The DMH-funded Coalition is only 2 years old and quickly becoming an integral part of how peer to peer supports are being provided to our mental health and recovery communities.

People with disabilities are more able to participate in a strong work force, when given the opportunity, the transportation, technology, and peer supports VCIL is able to provide.