

From: Elizabeth Sightler [esightler@ccs-vt.org]
Sent: Monday, February 09, 2015 1:14 PM
To: Maria Belliveau; Rebecca Buck
CC: Theresa Utton; Elizabeth Sightler
Subject: Champlain Community Services Budget testimony
Attachments: 2700_001.pdf

Hello Members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees,

Attached please find my perspective and testimony on the governors proposed budget for FY16 as it relates to developmental services.

Thank you for your time and commitment.

Beth

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Champlain Community Services

Senate and House Committees on Appropriations
State of Vermont
February 8, 2015

Dear Committee Members,

As Executive Director at Champlain Community Services (CCS), a Specialized Service Agency based in Colchester, Vermont I write in favor of the proposed 2.5 percent Medicaid increase, and in opposition to the proposed \$1.9 million “savings incentive” in developmental services.

Developmental Services agencies work on behalf of the state and its vulnerable people, and we bring value to Vermonters. As Medicaid providers *we are partners with the State*, helping to support its mission to provide care to its most needy, and to help all people to be robust contributors to their communities. At CCS we support 67 individuals with developmental/intellectual, physical, and psychiatric disabilities. We have been of service to Vermont for 48 years, and our primary focus is **job development**.

I am pleased that Governor Shumlin has proposed a 6 month **2.5 percent increase to Medicaid** in the FY’16 budget. A Medicaid rate increase will help us to sustain vulnerable Vermonters, maintain our performance, and allow us to support tax-paying Vermonters who deserve and want to work.

CCS prides itself on providing excellent job supports to clients in a supportive workplace. As an agency we maintain a very low admin rate, we scrutinize for efficiencies, and **we expect good outcomes from our work.**

CCS continues to have the *highest supported employment rate* in Vermont – **78 percent of the people we support have gainful employment (our grant target is 45 percent)**. Importantly, our clients recognize their **value** in the community and they **contribute in both taxes and social capitol**. We are helping people to reduce their dependence on the state. Ironically the creative and life-changing work we do - finding gainful employment for the people we serve - is hindered by our challenge to maintain a trained and vigorous workforce.

Currently CCS employs 56 staff and 29 contracted home providers. We are a good employer, and we value our staff and contracted workers. Yet our 2014 turnover survey shows that we **replaced 42 percent of our direct service workforce**, and exit

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Enhancing self-esteem, maximizing independence, and enabling community membership

interviews show that **85 percent of our staff cite financial hardship as their reason for leaving.** *They want to keep working at CCS, but they can't.*

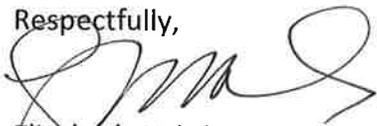
The 2014 CCS compensation study shows that the median direct service income is \$12.51 per hour, however The Vermont Legislature's Joint Fiscal Office puts the livable wage (for one person in a two-person home) at \$13 per hour. We want to provide work that's sustainable because for both our staff and clients it produces better outcomes, it supports hard-working people, and it reinforces our position that vulnerable Vermonters matter. **A 2.5 percent increase helps bring stability to our workforce and the population we serve.**

The Governor's proposed budget also includes a \$1.96 million dollar "savings incentive." I am sure you are aware that developmental services has had over \$14 million in reductions over the past 5 years (with one \$4 million increase in 2014). I agree that *we all need to do our share* – and I believe we have. Developmental Services is efficient, has done more with less for many years and is a willing collaborator in efficient caregiving. At this point a unilateral cut without carefully planned savings/efficiencies will result in: reductions in care for our vulnerable people, less help to sustain employment, less protection for population where 9 out of 10 are victims of abuse, and less natural and supported engagement in our communities.

At CCS, like other service agencies, we help people in Vermont do great work for a low price. We have a low administrative rate (6.1 percent), an efficient business office shared among 5 agencies, and highly regarded and robust outcomes, satisfaction surveys and Quality Reviews. We extend a warm welcome to each of you to visit us and see the good work we're doing.

Thank you all for your many years of public service and dedication to Vermont and its unique resources and challenges. By far the greatest asset of our keen little state is our openness to communication and creative problem-solving. I personally appreciate your welcoming and collaborative approach.

Respectfully,



Elizabeth Sightler
Executive Director

Champlain Community Services