

VT Center for Independent Living

My name is Sarah Launderville and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living. I am joined today with leaders from the disability community representing Green Mountain Self Advocates, Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights, and Disability Rights Vermont.

Last session lawmakers passed a budget that included a "disability tax". When determining a Reach Up benefit for parents with disabilities the state now counts \$125 of adult Supplemental Security Income (SSI) against a household's temporary cash assistance (Reach Up) benefits. At least 860 Vermont families are affected by this reduction.

Today, we are asking lawmakers to learn more about this reduction and repeal this decision quickly. Today, parents who have disabilities are now forced to decide what basic needs they will cut now that they have \$125 less per month.

The administration has stated the reason for the cut is to make the program consistent with other state benefit programs.

Consistency is a way to cut a program and not look deeper into the needs of those the program is supposed to serve.

Consistency makes it easier to not look at the impact this cut means to Vermonters with disabilities and their families.

Consistency would be taxing everyone, not just the lowest income, people with disabilities in Vermont.

We should be taking into account the very difficult decisions everyday made by parents with disabilities living below the poverty line.

We need to take into account that it costs more money to live with a disability. Many services needed to live independently are NOT covered by Medicaid or other programs.

Specialized equipment, specialized foods, having to hire someone to mow your lawn, shovel your driveway, help stack wood, bring out the trash, hire a driver to bring you places including the grocery store, specialized equipment in your car, the cost of an accessible van, American Sign Language interpreter for non-ADA related events.

If you need a home modification or assistive technology not covered by insurance there are programs, but there are waiting lists of up to two years to access those programs.

We spoke to a parent on Reach Up who had his stomach removed and can only eat small amounts of specific foods. These foods are extremely expensive. In addition, he has to purchase a protein supplement that costs \$20 and lasts about 2 weeks. That's \$40 a month that he does not have money for.

We ask lawmakers to reconsider this destructive decision and speak to the families it is now impacting.

Thank you.