COVE Testimony to Senate Appropriations Committee on FY '17 Budget
April 5, 2016

Good afternoon. My name is Gini Milkey and I am here as the Executive Director of the Community of Vermont Elders. I would like to address a few important issues in the FY 17 budget and appreciate very much the opportunity to do so.

First, we would note that the House-passed budget contains no state funds for the LIHEAP program, an essential program that helps keep Vermonters warm and safe. We would encourage the committee to go back to the practice from a few years ago in which the State's LIHEAP portion was included in the base budget. That would provide certainty for those elders and vulnerable Vermonters who depend on this important funding.

Second, we want to express our support for the Choices for Care budget as passed by the House. The need for elders to access supports allowing them to age in their homes and their communities is great, and we think the state should continue to examine how we can better support that program. Nonetheless, we do think that generally the House-passed CFC proposal is a step in the right direction.

One important issue that continues to be a problem for the CFC program is delays in eligibility determinations made by DCF. While the legislature directed a report on the topic last year, we haven't seen any tangible steps to move the issues forward. As a result, more often than not Vermonters awaiting eligibility determinations are forced to seek more expensive care in institutional settings or hospitals. That is neither economically prudent nor reflective of the desire of Vermonters to age in their communities. We encourage the committee to seek further explanation and answers to this vexing problem. If the successful pilot program that has not been re-funded were to be funded statewide, it would help to alleviate the delays.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues impacting elders across Vermont.