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HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

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MEMORANDUM

To: Representative Kitty Toll, Chair, House Committee on Appropriations

From: Representative Bill Lippert, Chair, House Committee on Health Care

Date: January 11, 2018

Subject: House Committee on Health Care FY 2018 BAA recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to review provisions of the Governor's FY 2018 budget adjustment proposal. The House Committee on Health Care has recommendations on the Department of Mental Health's proposal regarding street outreach workers and the Department of Health's proposal regarding the Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey.

Department of Mental Health: Street Outreach

The Department of Mental Health is requesting \$199,985 in FY 2018 budget adjustment for street outreach workers to be placed in six towns in Chittenden County and in Rutland, Barre/Montpelier, and Brattleboro. These areas were selected based on their elevated rates of individuals using hospital emergency departments, their considerable numbers of individuals experiencing homelessness, and their significant numbers of individuals receiving General Assistance.

The Committee was pleased to learn that the participating communities are interested in cooperating and would be matching the State's contributions in order to fund these outreach worker positions. The Committee believes that the mental health outreach services the workers will provide mend a hole in the safety net, which is why it is crucial that these services will be made available to anyone who needs them and not be provided on a fee-for-service basis. The Department of Mental Health's proposal, combined with the local matching funds, would support the cost of these positions in their entirety for the remainder of FY 2018. The proposal is consistent with the intent of 2017 Acts and Resolves No. 82 to address the difficulties that emergency departments experience in meeting the needs of individuals who present with symptoms of a mental health crisis.

On a vote of 10-0-1, the Committee supports this concept as an important first step in addressing the urgent need for crisis services. Because the six towns in Chittenden County are prepared to fully implement the street outreach worker initiative at this time, including initial financial commitments from those towns, the Committee endorses immediate funding through the FY 2018 budget adjustment act for four positions to serve those communities.

The Committee recommends that funding to implement this initiative statewide should be included in the FY 2019 budget as long as the Department of Mental Health has confirmed the interest and financial support of other communities and believes that statewide implementation is consistent with the Department's overall action plan to increase access to mental health services in Vermont. And, as health care reform initiatives move forward, the Committee also wants to ensure that the General Assembly does not lose sight of the goal of health care payment and delivery systems that are fully integrated across the entire continuum of health care services.

Department of Health: Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey

The Department of Health is requesting \$375,000 in FY 2018 budget adjustment to conduct the Vermont Household Health Insurance Survey early in 2018. Pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 9410(i), the Commissioner of Health must submit a recommendation to the General Assembly by January 15, 2018 and every three years thereafter for conducting a survey of the health insurance status of Vermont residents. The survey was last conducted in 2014; responsibility for the survey was transferred from the Commissioner of Financial Regulation to the Commissioner of Health the following year. The survey has historically collected information on health insurance coverage in Vermont and on the demographic, economic, health status, and employment-related characteristics of Vermont's population to support the State's analytical needs for measuring changes in the population, in insurance coverage, and in the affordability of and financial access to health insurance and health care over time. On a vote of 10-0-1, the Committee supports the Department of Health's proposal to conduct the survey again in 2018. It is important not only to collect updated information about Vermonters generally and as a measure of the State's progress in reducing the number of uninsured, but also to serve as a baseline against which to measure the implementation and outcomes of the All-Payer Model and other health care reform initiatives. It is also imperative that the information be collected and analyzed in a manner that is consistent with the Vermont Household Health Insurance Surveys conducted in 2000, 2005, 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2014 to allow for the identification and evaluation of trends over time.