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OFFICE OF THE HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

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Office of the Health Care Advocate Faces a \$110,000 Cut

The Governor proposed a **\$110,833** cut to the Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA). The General Fund portion of this total is 27.5% or **\$30,479**. The remainder is matched in the bill back process through the Green Mountain Care Board.

A budget cut of \$110,833 would force us to cut over 1.5 of our 7 advocates at a time when Vermonters as they try to navigate a complex and expensive health care system and understand the changes happening at the federal and state level. Each month we work with hundreds of Vermonters who call us for help.

By having the Health Care Advocate active in both regulatory and policy making decisions, we are able to bring Vermont consumers voice to these considerations. Our daily direct advocacy activities on behalf of Vermonters allow us to identify systemic issues that inform our policy positions.

- Our call volumes remain high. The HCA opened 945 cases in the last three months. These are Vermonters who are often at wits end struggling with their providers, their insurance company, or Vermont Health Connect and who continue to need help accessing care.
- The HCA policy team took on new work on behalf of Vermonters in recent years with an expanded role in the hospital budget review process and new regulation of Accountable Care Organizations.
- Recent actions by the federal government have presented new challenges for Vermonters and Vermont policy makers.
- The HCA works hard to reach people who will benefit from our help. We are currently partnering with 22 local Vermont pharmacies to help people when they have access to care needs that are too challenging for pharmacy staff to adequately address.

The Office of the Health Care Advocate bill back statute:

18 V.S.A. § 9607 (b)(1)

Expenses incurred by the Office of the Health Care Advocate for services related to the Green Mountain Care Board's and Department of Financial Regulation's regulatory and supervisory duties shall be borne as follows:

- (A) 27.5 percent by the State from State monies;
- (B) 24.2 percent by the hospitals;
- (C) 24.2 percent by nonprofit hospital and medical service corporations licensed under 8 V.S.A. chapter 123 or 125; and
- (D) 24.2 percent by health insurance companies licensed under 8 V.S.A. chapter 101.

The Office of the Health Care Advocate, previously named the Office of Health Care Ombudsman, is a special project of Vermont Legal Aid.