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Senate Appropriations Committee  
Vermont State House  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, Vermont 05633-5301  
Attn: Senator Kitchel, Chair

Dear Senator Kitchel,

I am writing on behalf of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights (VCDR), and as the executive director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL) to share our thoughts about the budget proposal.

The mission of VCDR is to advance the human and civil rights of people with disabilities to ensure full and equal participation in all aspects of community life and the political process. VCDR is comprised of 26 member organizations including local and statewide organizations of Vermonters with disabilities, parents, advocates and service providers.

There are a few areas of the budget that we want to highlight for your consideration.

#### The Attendant Service Program

VCDR does not support the administration's proposal to reduce funding to the Attendant Service Program. We are hoping that you will consider putting the nearly \$1.4 million back into the budget to serve Vermonters with disabilities in need of attendant

care. We also hope you consider adding additional revenue to this important program that has been frozen for the past three years.

We've talked with many who are on the program and concerned about losing this powerful and important service. I appreciate that the administration has said that nobody will be "cut off" from this program, but I want to add that people have already historically been "cut off". This program was put on hold years ago. VCDR not only is asking for the nearly \$1.4 million to be restored, but that the program receive additional funding so that more individuals with significant disabilities in need of attendant services have the opportunity to live a more independent life allowing for them to work and save money and not live in poverty.

#### Developmental Services

VCDR supports the house version of the budget that restores the \$4.3 million (\$2 million in general fund) that the administration's budget had cut to developmental services. These programs provide important supports to Vermonters with developmental disabilities and allow them to live in their community and be included.

#### Vermont Legal Aid

VCDR is opposed to cutting nearly \$200,000 from Vermont Legal Aid. We understand that the entire cut will come out of the poverty legal assistance and that will affect people with disabilities who have been harmed and cannot afford legal assistance.

#### AHS Contracts/Grants

VCDR is concerned with the proposed \$2 million reduction to "AHS-wide contracts/grants."

To our knowledge specific information about these cuts have not been made so we cannot comment on the specific grants and

would appreciate the opportunity to have that information be transparent so we can testify to these cuts. The current budget proposal is very concerning to our members of how it affects people with disabilities, so while the administration has said it will focus on minimizing impacts to Vermont's most vulnerable, we remain skeptical based on the cuts that were already proposed by the administration.

### Reach-UP

VCDR is asking that the reduction to Reach-Up grants (\$1,159,485) for case management, employment support, housing, transportation be restored. In addition VCDR continues to ask that the legislature repeal the law that counts SSI income in the calculation for parents on reach up. Over 800 Vermont families are affected by this reduction of \$125 per month. This reduction targets Vermont parents who, by Social Security Administration definition are unable to work as a result of their unique disabilities.

### VT Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired

VCDR supports an increase of \$100,000 (\$200,000) total- Global Commitment to the VT Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Funding for rehabilitation services for the blind and visually impaired has not increased in thirteen years despite rising caseload and needs. VABVI services help Vermonters stay independent and active in their communities. Without these services people who are blind or have a visual disability are 15 times more likely to end up in assisted living or a nursing home.

### Developmental Services; Flexible Family Funding

VCDR would like the Flexible Family Funding program to be raised to \$1,548 per year. Flexible Family Funding is a program that serves everyone well by supporting families and allowing individuals with developmental disabilities to live at home while avoiding costly out-of-home services. The program has been supporting families to care for their loved one at home since 2000, but has not been increased to keep up with inflation. In

fact, a few years ago there was a reduction. The current maximum benefit for this income based program is \$1,000 per year. To restore this program to a level that is in line with inflation, it would need to be raised to a maximum benefit of \$1,548.

S.162

VCDR asks for your support in funding the position outlined in S.162 of a Deaf/Hard of Hearing/DeafBlind Services Director.

Thank you for your time. If you have any follow up questions please feel free to reach out [slaunderville@vcil.org](mailto:slaunderville@vcil.org) or 802-224-1817.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah Launderville". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Sarah Launderville  
President, VCDR