

Date: March 29, 2018
To: Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
From: Ed Paquin, Executive Director, DRVT
In re.: FY'19 Budget, Administration & House

DRVT appreciates the invitation to comment on budget proposals made by the Administration and actions taken by the House of Representatives. We believe that the basic assumption that growth in assistance to Vermonters with serious disabilities must be limited to the rate of growth in current revenue presents challenges. Caseload growth and increases in cost of living, particularly for people with high medical needs, can be managed after a fashion, but not without harming either the health, independence or access to opportunity of these people.

Within the assumed limitations, the House tried hard to mitigate the impact of the Administration's proposal:

- Cuts to Legal Aid's poverty law work and Office of the Healthcare Advocate were restored. This is very important to the disability community, because of the unfortunate truth that disability and poverty far too often go hand-in-hand. And clearly, there is value across the population to the expertise that the HCA brings as we face uncertainty in all aspects of paying for health care.
- The Administration budget provided for caseload growth in Developmental Services at the expense of individual service plans on which people with developmental disabilities and their families rely. Fortunately the House restored this cut, though as I understand it was to this year's level without any inflation.
- There was an increase of 2% to Home & Community Based Services providers in the Choices for Care program.
- DRVT also sees value in some of the mental health efforts supported, such as the peer operated warm line and pilots for crisis intervention.

There are some areas that have been left out of the House areas that should be considered:

- The requirement for the AHS to make \$2,000,000 in cuts to grants without specifying what is to be cut seems a ceding of control by the legislature.
- Cuts to the Reach Up “infrastructure” were not restored, likely damaging the ability to access help in getting and succeeding at employment, case management, and housing and transportation supports.
- Nothing was added for services for the Blind delivered by VABVI, a need that has been growing, but something that has been frozen for ten years.
- And perhaps the biggest omission was support for the second year of the effort which began in this committee last year to increase wages in the Designated and Special Service Agencies to levels distantly comparable to those in other social services and state employment.
- Nothing has been done to remediate the “disability tax” levied several years ago which counts \$125 of an adult’s Supplemental Security Income against what the family might be receiving through Reach Up to support their children.

The House restored about half of CURRENT funding to the Participant Directed Attendant Care (PDAC). DRVT appreciates that the House did not go along with elimination of the program, but we really believe that this is a model program for independent living and it is a travesty that it has been capped for three years. It is among very few programs in which we assist people with disabilities to access true opportunity without requiring that they spend down to Medicaid.

DRVT understands the difficulty of putting together a budget and that the political forces that play into the process cannot be ignored. These difficulties are not equal to the obvious challenges faced by people with serious disabilities who also deal with public perceptions of diminished worth. This committee is charged with advancing the health and welfare of Vermonters and we appreciate your consideration of our input.

Thank you!