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Health Care Advocate comments on H.924

April 4, 2018

To Senator Jane Kitchel
Senate Appropriations Committee

Health Care Advocate Funding

The HCA supports and appreciates the House position on fully funding the Office of the Health Care Advocate and Vermont Legal Aid. The Governor proposed an **\$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.

Vermont Cost Sharing Reduction

We do not support the repeal of Vermont Cost Sharing Reduction (VCSR).

Our opposition to this cut is in the context of the long-term effort to add and maintain public monies for the support of Vermonters' access to necessary care. We believe the need for these funds is just as acute today as it was when these funds were first appropriated. We also believe that there is a likelihood that Federal actions will further destabilize the marketplace leading to an increased need for these supports in the future.

The potential positive impact of the silver loading strategy passed earlier this year does not alter our position. The Silver Loading strategy is not a long-term strategy that is likely to last for even a few years. If Silver Loading is successful this year and many people eligible for VCSR are able to and choose to buy richer plans with increased PTCs, the cost of VCSR will go down diminishing the effect of this proposed reduction. Due to Silver Loading, the cost of VCSR will be substantially less than what is booked in the budget. Therefore, much of the budget reduction resulting from this proposed cut can be achieved while keeping VCSR in place for those who may need it.

Lastly, the process of helping Vermonters get the best health plan this year will be significantly more complicated. This complication will surely lead to some people purchasing plans that are not ideal for them. The existence of Vermont Cost Sharing Reduction is an important support for one set of that population.

Thank you for considering this perspective on behalf of Vermont consumers.

Mike Fisher
Chief Health Care Advocate

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