



STATE OF VERMONT
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND
WELFARE

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MEMORANDUM

To: Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair, Senate Committee on Appropriations

From: Senator Claire Ayer, Chair, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Date: April 20, 2017

Subject: Committee priorities for the FY18 budget bill

The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare appreciates the opportunity to provide input on our priorities for the fiscal year 2018 budget bill. While we recognize that a large portion of the State budget funds programs in or related to the Agency of Human Services and its departments, we find it very difficult to recommend specific cuts when we know that they will impact the most vulnerable Vermonters. All the same, we would appreciate the Senate Committee on Appropriations providing some guidance to the Agency on where to direct its \$2.5 million in cuts and not leave it solely to the discretion of the Administration.

We have arranged our specific budget requests by category; the first two categories, mental health services and services for children, are our top priorities.

Mental Health Services

The Senate Committee on Health and Welfare took extensive testimony and spent several weeks crafting a bill to improve access to mental health services and increase care coordination, and we are grateful to the Senate Committee on Appropriations for your support of S.133. We urge the Committee to continue its support by including the necessary funding in the budget to support the initiatives in S.133, including facilitating the recruitment and retention of high-quality mental health professionals in our community system of care by increasing Medicaid rates to the designated agencies and specialized services agencies.

Services for Children

The Committee on Health and Welfare encourages the Committee on Appropriations to fund services for Vermont's children, including child care and children's health services. Specifically, the Committee on Health and Welfare recommends investments in the following:

- Child care subsidies – We recommend a \$9.5 million increase to the Department for Children for the Child Care Financial Assistance Program to address the misalignment between current tuition assistance rates and current market rates and to bring eligibility guidelines in line with current Federal Poverty Levels.

- Early childhood educator workforce – We recommend a \$926,000 appropriation to address the shortage of qualified early childhood educators by turning the TEACH Vermont pilot program into a permanent program. The funding would cover 50 scholarships each for Associate’s degree programs and Bachelor’s degree programs for one year, as well as 20 licensure fees.
- Parent-child centers – We recommend an \$8 million increase to the Parent-Child Centers’ Master Grant to ensure the availability of essential services for vulnerable families, including prevention of and intervention in adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) and coordinating and providing child care services, Children’s Integrated Services (CIS), and Integrated Family Services (IFS).
- Children’s Integrated Services – CIS has been level-funded for many years, despite an increased demand for these family-centered, results-accountable prevention and early intervention services for families of children up to six years of age. At the request of organizations that contract with the State to provide CIS services, we recommend a funding increase in an amount to be determined by the Committee on Appropriations.

Home Health Care Services

The Committee on Health and Welfare urges the Committee on Appropriations to maintain the \$1.16 million increase in Medicaid rates for home health services included in the House-passed budget.

Low-Income Individuals with Disabilities and Vulnerable Adults

The Committee on Health and Welfare supports the following proposals to assist low-income Vermonters with disabilities and vulnerable adults:

- Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired – We recommend a \$50,000 increase to continue and expand services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired and to provide training on technology that will likely improve their quality of life.
- Vermont Legal Aid – We recommend maintenance of the amounts restored to Vermont Legal Aid in the House-passed budget as follows:
 - \$44,500 (gross) that the Governor’s proposed budget would have cut for office space for Legal Aid’s Mental Health Law Project (MHLP). The MHLP is obligated by contracts with the Agency of Human Services and the Department of Mental Health to provide services to Vermonters and will continue to do so, which means that Vermont Legal Aid would have had to cut the funds from elsewhere in its budget. The Committee supports restoring these funds.
 - \$50,000 (gross) to the Office of the Health Care Advocate based on the Administration’s projection of a reduced need for the Office’s services if more Vermonters are enrolling in Exchange plans directly with plan carriers. While there may be fewer calls related to Exchange plan enrollment, it is likely that the Office will experience increased call volume as a result of consumer confusion regarding direct enrollment and subsidies, implementation of the all-payer model, and the uncertain future of the Affordable Care Act. 2016 Acts and Resolves No. 113 also added roles in accountable care organization (ACO) budget review and ACO grievance and appeals processes to the duties of the Office. DVHA’s

proposed cut to the Office would have resulted in the loss of an advocate position. The Committee supports restoring these funds.

- Meals on Wheels – We recommend a \$20,000 increase to help address a waiting list in the basic meals program administered by the Vermont Center for Independent Living. We also request that the Committee on Appropriations consider directing the Agency of Human Services to pursue an amendment to the Global Commitment waiver to include home-delivered meals as a covered service under the Choices for Care program so the State would only be required to provide the General Fund portion of Meal on Wheels funding.
- Vocational Rehabilitation – We recommend restoring the \$344,454 reduction to the budget of the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DAIL/VR) for the Developmental Services Supported Employment program and the \$600,000 reduction to the DAIL/VR budget for the JOBS program. We further recommend exploring the extent to which Global Commitment funds may be used for these purposes on an ongoing basis, as they were when DAIL/VR lost federal funding for these programs in FY17.

Cold Weather Exemption

The Committee on Health and Welfare recommends that the Committee on Appropriations restore the \$344,000 cut by the House for the Cold Weather Exemption policy for General Assistance emergency housing.

Workforce Development Programs

The Committee on Health and Welfare is concerned about proposed cuts to workforce development programs and the effects of these cuts on Vermonters in transition, including those recently released from the custody of the Department of Corrections and those who recently completed a treatment program for substance use disorder. We would like to see these programs maintained.

Community Grants for ACE-Related Services

To the extent funds are available, the Committee on Health and Welfare recommends that the Committee on Appropriations consider providing grants to local communities to coordinate services related to prevention of and intervention in adverse childhood experiences.