

Hi Diane

I hope that the committee will once again recommend to the legislature again this (retuning) recommendation on the Economic Empowerment front.

I am also submitting the Reach-Up Report from January of 2019 because it reports on the value of Financial Capabilities in lifting people out of poverty.

Evaluation of Reach Up – Report to Legislature January 2019

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Reach-Up-Annual-Report-2019.01.31.pdf>

I'd like to expand the request in section (d) to include not only "financial literacy" education that we provide in school curriculums but also financial empowerment programs for adults that the Reach-up report talks about. I will suggest some language if needed (for now I just inserted "financial cvcapabilities" in the existing language in document attached).

Also in this year's report I'd like to include financial support (from the State) for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program administered by Community Action which saves low income Vermonters upwards of 8 million dollars in taxes and credits. We heard excellent testimony a on that program as well.

VITA PROGRAM

<https://legislature.vermont.gov/Documents/2020/WorkGroups/ACCP/Documents%20&%20Handouts/W~Travis%20Poulin~VITA%20information~9-26-2019.pdf>

On Reach- Up we may need to adjust language to reflect the increase in the program from last year, but we still want to eliminate the SSI "Disability Tax" of \$77 a month that still remains.

EXCERPT - Advisory Council on Child Poverty and Strengthening Families 2018 Report

4. Economic Empowerment and Employment Supports

The Advisory Council recommends:

(a) increasing the minimum wage in Vermont alongside corresponding adjustments in benefits eligibility to avoid a net loss to beneficiaries;

(b) the adoption of paid family and medical leave legislation;

(c) increasing **base** funding for economic programs that create jobs and build savings and assets, for example, the Micro-Business Development Program and the Vermont Matched Savings Program (formerly Individual Development Account);

(d) investing in workforce training, **financial capability programs**, and financial literacy education;

(e) supporting transportation-related public initiatives, including increasing public transportation options, increasing access to reliable and affordable vehicles, and providing license fee and fine remediation assistance;

(f) support funding for tax preparation programs for low income, for example, the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program

(g) increasing Reach Up financial assistance for households to one hundred percent of their basic needs based on the current cost of living, with automatic increases for inflation; and (g) reversing the reduction in Reach Up grant amounts for households where an adult with a disability is receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Recognizing that Reach Up grants to families have not had a cost of living adjustment since 2004 and now provide less than 40 percent of the income needed to meet basic needs, the Advisory Council recommends that Reach Up financial assistance be increased to ensure 100 percent of a household's basic needs are funded based on the current cost of living. The Advisory Council also recognizes that poverty is both a cause and consequence of living with disabilities and that people with disabilities experience poverty at a rate more than twice that of the general population.

10 To that end, the Advisory Council recommends the reversal of the SSI Reach Up benefit reduction.