

## **Vermont Center for Independent Living Public Hearing: Governors Recommended 2021 Budget**

**August 27, 2020**

Good afternoon, my name is Sarah Launderville and I'm the Executive Director of the Vermont Center for Independent Living. VCIL is a statewide nonprofit organization with a focus on working with people with disabilities. I am also testifying as President of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Today, I'd like to ask for support for a few different programs.

The first is to unfreeze and fund the Participant Directed Attendant Care (PDAC) program.

Attendant support is essential for people with physical disabilities being able to live. Attendants, support people with disabilities with specific activities like eating, toileting, bathing and meal preparation. With these essential services folks with disabilities are then able to work, have families and participate in their community.

The PDAC program is an equalizer. It is funded by the general fund, and because of that it allows for greater independence of the participants. This program allows a person with significant disability to have their basic needs met so they can work. Unlike Choices for Care the PDAC program allows a person to work without worrying about having to limit their income and keep assets without the fear of losing assistance.

We are asking the program be unfrozen and the money be restored to ensure that young people who are graduating college this year and have employment opportunities don't have to turn career opportunities away.

We believe that employment is really important for folks with disabilities. We know that when people with disabilities want to try and work, there are so many disincentives including losing access to

medical care that people need to weigh all their options. VCIL works closely with Vocational Rehabilitation and their counselors help people navigate these very complicated systems.

There are at least four open VR Counselor positions throughout the state that cannot be filled.

We'd like the hiring freeze for Vocational Rehabilitation to be lifted.

This is an extraordinary time of opportunity for employment. There are lots of issues but there is also opportunity happening. Businesses are now more responsive to work from home options and flexible schedules which are sometimes what will help a person with a disability be able to work. The pandemic has shifted a lot for folks with disabilities and it is very important that employment counseling is available so that people with disabilities have assistance in navigating all the options and opportunities around employment they have. We're hoping the hiring freeze will be lifted which will allow more people with disabilities in being able to work.

Finally we want to highlight our Designated Agencies who have been there to meet the new needs during the pandemic. We are in support of them receiving a 3% rate increase to continue their important services to of support in employment, housing, mental health and substance use disorder services.

Thank you very much.

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