

House Appropriations Testimony
Patricia Tedesco
Home Access Program
Vermont Center for Independent Living
February 21, 2019

Good morning. My name is Patricia Tedesco and I coordinate the Home Access Program at the Vermont Center for Independent Living. I'm also a Steering Committee member of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition. We appreciate your long-standing support.

The Home Access Program provides ramps and bathroom modifications for low-income Vermonters with permanent physical disabilities so they can stay in their own home.

A Chittenden County resident with MS commented: "Before I received the bathroom modification, I had to be supervised by my wife when showering and then rest for the whole day after because it was so exhausting. Now I can shower independently and I'm not completely worn out ... and ...now I'm safe when showering."

This type of independent living is VCIL's goal for Vermonters.

Since VHCB is our primary funding source, we request they be funded at the highest level possible - their FY 20 funding level required by statute is estimated at \$21.8 million from the Property Transfer Tax. As Vermont's real estate markets grow stronger, the Transfer Tax is generating record high revenues, a share of which should go to VHCB by law. The Governor's budget proposes diverting \$7.4 million from VHCB for other purposes, instead of helping alleviate our affordable housing crisis for low- and moderate-income Vermonters and the people with disabilities who we serve.

We recognize the budget struggles, but full, statutory funding for VHCB would help provide accessible housing for people with disabilities, as well as supporting the other housing needs VHCB fulfills. At a minimum, please reject the Governor's proposal to cut VHCB by \$1M.

Last year VCIL completed 71 projects with funding from VHCB, DAIL and additional funding from the housing bond. Traditionally, our program helps about 40 households a year with funding levels between \$425,000 and \$475,000 from VHCB and \$100,000 from DAIL.

The average cost of a home modification is about \$10,000 compared to spending about \$97,000 a year for a nursing home bed. Our program is evidence based and is saving the State money in the Human Services budget.

The additional housing bond funds helped bring our wait list down to 29 people, instead of the usual 60 or so folks who might wait up to two years for help. When the housing bond funds are gone at the end of next year, we know the wait list will jump again.

Since VCIL's program depends in large part on VHCB's appropriation, we ask you to provide them with full statutory funding, but certainly no less than last year's funding level of \$15.4 million.

Thank you for your time, I know you have difficult decisions to make.

Submitted by Patricia Tedesco
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"Now that I have a modified bathroom, I can bathe without fear of falling, which in the past, I had close calls. The tub was too high to climb over. Now I bathe every day."
Irena Anderson, Hyde Park, Lamoille County



"Before I received the ramp, I had to have help getting my wheelchair in and out of my trailer. There were weeks at a time that I couldn't go outside. Now I feel more independent. I can be outside whenever I want. I have a better quality of life. I don't feel trapped inside. (This) helped my depression." Mary Hoague, Swanton, Franklin County



“If someone doesn’t know about VCIL’s Home Access Program yet, I would tell them it’s a great program because it gives you your independence, dignity and your ability back to do things for yourself again. I also want to say thanks to the program for the ramp that made my life a lot more easier and less stress, so I can do more for myself now...” Christine Watkins, Center Rutland, Rutland County



“I applied to VCIL’s Home Access Program because I needed some help to go in and out of my house so I can get to my doctor appointment.... Now I can go and do things on my own.” Avon Livingston, South Royalton, Windsor County (Rec’d bath & ramp)



“I can move more freely down the ramp and onto my porch.... This program provided me with a ramp that I would never be able to afford. I thank VCIL for making this possible.” William Spaulding, Bellows Falls, Windham County



“I needed a ramp so I could use my walker to help me in and out of the house. I have several medical issues so the ramp is so much appreciated and is making such a difference in my everyday life.” Audrey Downey, East Burke, Caledonia County



“Before I received the bathroom modification, I had to be supervised by my wife when showering and then rest for the whole day after because it was so exhausting. Now I can shower independently and I’m not completely worn out after and also now I’m safe when showering.” Cheyenne Journey, Essex, Chittenden County



“Now that I have (a lift), I can get out of my home without help. Sometimes I am alone and if I need to get outside, I can without help. This is good for safety if I need to get out of the house. I also wanted to say, my life has changed. I can go outside now without difficulties. I was stuck in the house, now I am not anymore.” Diane Lessard, Fair Haven, Rutland County