



96 Main St
Spfld VT

**United Nurses &
Allied Professionals,
Local 5051**
Elizabeth Mueller,
Chairperson

January 23, 2019

Dear Representative Johnson and Senator Kitchel:

My name is Elizabeth Mueller. I work at Health Care & Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont (HCRS). I am a licensed mental health clinician, I am also the President of the Clinician's Union at HCRS. We are the direct care workers at HCRS.

We are again seeking your support and commitment on crafting legislation to support 'pass through' funding for direct care workers salary increases. In 2013 the State Legislature passed a one-time measure ensuring that Medicaid rate increases to designated agencies (DAs). DAs like HCRS were, in part, to use 'pass through' to fund salaries increases of individuals who provide the direct care to consumers. The purpose of the measure was to make sure that DAs were, among other things, offering competitive wages and benefits to recruit and retain highly qualified direct care staff. In subsequent years similar legislation has been passed, but with limited focus on rate increases being designated to support pay increases for direct care workers. Consequently, direct care workers have yielded minimal benefits as DAs have understood this to equate to rate increases being designated to 'operating costs.'

Helping professions *such as* mental health clinicians, social workers and other direct care staff are some of lowest paid *professionals*. Many direct care staff work two jobs in order to survive. Without the prospect of salary increases, it is difficult to recruit and retain staff to provide needed support to consumers who are working through substance use and/or mental health challenges. When agencies are not able to recruit and retain staff, there are gaps in services. For example, long wait times for consumers to obtain services, high case-loads, staff turn-over, and staff burn-outs. All of these factors negatively impact direct care worker's ability to do what we strive to do, help our communities.

For this reason, I respectfully request that the House and Senate Appropriations Committees again consider including the following language in the FY 2019 Budget Bill:

Sec. E.314.5 RATE INCREASE

(a) Revenue generated from the Medicaid rate increases in this act shall be used by designated agencies and specialized service agencies to provide a commensurate

increase in wages for direct care workers. Such increases shall not be offset by wage increases due under a collective bargaining agreement. Each designated and specialized service agency shall report to the Agency of Human Services how it has complied with this provision.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or would like more information.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Mueller, LCMHC
President, UNAP Local 5051

Cc:
Jessica Oski, Necrason Group