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Date: February 6, 2020
From: Ed Paquin, Executive Director, Disability Rights Vermont
To: House Committee on Human Services
In Re: H:611

DRVT appreciates the opportunity to comment on H:611, Vermont's proposed "Older Vermonters Act," and very much supports the spirit of this bill, particularly as delineated in the eight items covered in the statement of Principles (§ 6202). We believe that most of the Vermonters affected by this legislation have some degree of disability, and indeed one could substitute the words "people with disabilities" for "older Vermonters" in the principles without disservice to our "constituency."

In addition to our general support for H:611, DRVT would observe:

- The reporting of Adult Protective Services activities required in (e)(6) will help to insure that the great improvement in APS services that has occurred in recent years will continue. Broad awareness of APS by lawmakers will help keep a focus on their valuable work.
- Sections 2, 3 and 4, regarding rate setting for Home and Community Based providers, should help to insure continuing quality in services that can atrophy when general inflation, particularly increasing staff health care costs, are not considered. This concept could well apply to all private sector services with which the State contracts to perform the duties of the State.
- DRVT would suggest that in Sec. 5. The Self-Neglect Working Group be expanded to include the State's designated protection and advocacy agency. The P&A has long experience working with people with disabilities, young and old, and our work with Adult Protective Services has brought us close to the ongoing policy conversations regarding self-neglect. We serve on the Vulnerable Adult Fatality Review Team and have reviewed the details of a number of cases that could be seen as having self-neglect at their center.
- DRVT would hope that in considering this legislation, the Committee also recognize, as did the Older Vermonters Act Working Group, that older Vermonters, particularly those with disabilities who may not be economically destitute, can benefit and enrich our State when they receive a degree of support from other, complementary programs like the Participant Directed Attendant Care Program. See the OVAWG report at:
https://dail.vermont.gov/sites/dail/files//documents/OVAWG_Final_Report_with_appendices.pdf

Aging brings unique issues but the common issues of disability are far greater, and most of the services addressed in the bill are needed because of the disabilities we gain when we age. We appreciate your work to assist all Vermonters to live with dignity.

Defending and Advancing the rights of people with disabilities & mental health issues, and of the Deaf.