

Senate Appropriations Testimony
Patricia Tedesco
Home Access Program
Vermont Center for Independent Living
April 16, 2019

Good afternoon. 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 and the difficult choices you have to make again this year.

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 gentleman who lives in Derby – in Orleans County – comments: “I have Parkinson’s and dementia, limiting my mobility and causing safety issues. The ramp is life changing. I can now go up and down by myself, giving me freedom to live a normal life.”

Also, in Orleans County, a woman who has an amputation, diabetes, nerve damage, osteoarthritis, heart disease and partial blindness told us the ramp improved her ability to live on her own: “I can get out of my house without help. This was the first important step to getting a wheelchair so I will not be housebound any more. This ramp will help me get my independence back.”

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 cuts \$1 million from VHCB’s FY 19 funding level and proposes diverting a total of \$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. The House, thankfully, was able to restore at least the Governor’s \$1 million cut. We are hoping you will be able to improve on that.

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.

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.

Our projects also create and preserve good-paying jobs in the construction industry. Last year HAP projects employed at least 20 contractors all around the state, most of whom have other employees or subcontract parts of the job.

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



“I applied to VCIL’s program because there were so many things I could have gotten hurt on, the bathtub was way too high, I had tripped four times getting out of it, it is so nice just to walk out of the shower safely. I am able to stay home instead of a nursing home.” Cynthia Brace-Etter, Bennington (town & county)



"I have Parkinson's and dementia, limiting my mobility and causing safety issues. The ramp is life changing. I can now go up and down by myself, giving me freedom to live a normal life." Roger Raboin, Derby, Orleans 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 get out of my house without help. This was the first important step to getting a wheelchair so I will not be housebound any more. This ramp will help me get my independence back.” Donna Benedict, Coventry, Orleans 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