

Senate Appropriations Committee Testimony

April 17, 2019

General-funded Attendant Services Program (ASP/ Personally-directed Attendant Care (PDAC)

On behalf of The Vermont Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL), as well as Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights (VCDR), I would like to thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of unfreezing the general-funded Attendant Services Program (ASP), also known as the Personally-directed Attendant Care (PDAC) program.

This invaluable program, which has been inequitably frozen to new applicants for more than 4 years, assists people with profound disabilities who require personal attendant care to live independently, with dignity and self-respect in a cost-effective manner. It allows this population to manage their own care (such as hiring attendants and setting hours needed) in an atmosphere of self-determination. Indeed in many case, such a program allows for opportunity for employment, recreation and many other productive functions of living independently (such as shopping, medical visits, etc.).

The increase in productivity and implied cost-effectiveness is not limited to direct employment opportunities of the beneficiary. This program may also allow the beneficiary's spouse or other family member, for example, to be employed independently. In any case, it precludes costly and undignified institutionalization for many who do not choose this option.

The great state of Vermont, through its elected officials, realized many years ago that there is a need for the population requiring personal attendant care who may not qualify for Medicaid to receive such care through a State program. Such services simply "level the playing field" and preclude impoverishment for people with disabilities motivated in fulfilling life goals and dreams. The program indeed decreases the chances, in many situations, of the need for full entitlements.

On Disability Awareness Day, 2018, David Sagi, Vermont Department of Disability, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) Title II ADA Coordinator, courageously and poignantly testified against elimination of the general-funded ASP/PDAC program. His testimony was heeded and the program was saved. Ironically, on Disability Awareness Day, 2019, David passed away after a long illness. David, a wheelchair user, who became paralyzed after an accident decades ago, embarked upon a career of public service after his accident. Aside from his formal ADA supervision efforts, he served as alderman of Rutland City, a member of the Vermont Access Board and Regional Manager for Vermont Vocational Rehabilitation for Rutland/Bennington

Districts. In the latter position, he assisted many people with disabilities seek and maintain employment and live productive lives.

David utilized the general-funded Attendant Care Program over many years. It allowed him to earn and accrue income and assets – well-deserved – and live a dignified, productive life. Given 5 years to live after his accident, he lived into his 70's assisting others in achieving their life goals. He is not alone.

I respectfully urge the Vermont Senate and legislature to consider the positive consequences of re-opening the Attendant Services Program to those qualified, of eliminating the existing inequity, of honoring the name and life of David Sagi – not for the sake of his memory alone, but for the long term good that it will bestow upon people with disabilities who desire to live, work and recreate productively as every other citizen has an opportunity to do.

Let us continue the tradition of rational humanity of this great State.

I thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Sam Liss

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Vice-President, Board of Directors, Vermont Center for Independent Living (VCIL)