

State of Vermont

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Agency of Human Services

Date: August 26, 2020

To: Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee

From: Angela Smith-Dieng, Director, Adult Services Division, Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living

Re: Testimony on H.611, the Older Vermonters Act

DAIL is very supportive of H.611 and appreciates the extensive work put into it to date beginning with the Older Vermonters Act Working Group created in 2018 via Act 172 to develop recommendations for this bill, all the way through the bill's passage in the House.

- Section 6202, "The Principles of a System of Supports, Services, and Protections for Older Vermonters" is the heart and soul of the bill, developed collaboratively in the working group over a year and a half. Together, they outline a positive vision for collective action around the work we do and the Vermont we want to build for all of us as we age. At DAIL we are eager to use these principles, which strengthen our mission, as we strive to serve all Vermonters.
- Section 6206 tasks DAIL with expanding the State Plan on Aging, which we are already required to develop every four years for our Older Americans Act work, to include not only OAA work but also our long-term services and supports work, particularly Choices for Care. The next plan will include a comprehensive review of our systems of support and services for older Vermonters across the spectrum of need, from meals and programs at senior centers to the daily care needs of those living with dementia in community. We will incorporate these new elements into our next State Plan on Aging which begins October 1, 2022. We have already begun the needs assessment process and will be asking older Vermonters, family caregivers and stakeholders the key questions to address the elements within this section of the bill.
- Section 2 refers to the Adult Protective Services providing an annual program report to the legislature. It is important to note that this section is separate from the Older Vermonters Act and instead modifies the APS statute. DAIL is supportive of this report, since APS already submit this information voluntarily to the legislature. It will now be a yearly requirement for reporting that we are happy to continue to do.

- Section 3 sets forth a process for the creation of a “Vermont Action Plan for Aging Well.” Similar to California’s “Master Plan on Aging,” which the SCAN Foundation presented to the legislature on last winter, Vermont’s Action Plan for Aging Well would be a blueprint for moving the State forward in a way that embraces and celebrates aging and older Vermonters. DAIL looks forward to collaborating on a proposal for developing this action plan alongside the Agency of Administration and the Department of Health. For a few years now we have been exploring the idea of seeking to make Vermont a designated “Age-Friendly State” and this effort will move us further toward that goal. The challenge for DAIL is the timing; the proposal is due by May 1, 2021. Given the intense focus on COVID-19 response by all three agencies, we are concerned that we will not be able to give the work on this proposal the time and energy that is needed, and we would request a later deadline.
- Regarding Section 6, the home and community-based rate study, inflation factor and report, DAIL is supportive of this work as we recognize this is much needed within our service system for the sustainability of our provider network, and we will support the Department of Vermont Health Access through this effort. Again, our only concern is timing, that the deadline of April 15, 2021 may not be feasible due to the intense workload related to COVID19, but defer to DVHA as the lead department for their perspective.
- Finally, Section 7, the Self-Neglect Work Group and Report: One of the original recommendations of the Older Vermonters Act Working Group was that the State seek to better address self-neglect. Given the complexity of self-neglect, DAIL is very supportive of this work group and the task we are given to develop a report that seeks to understand its causes, prevalence, resources for response and prevention. Vermont is one of only a few states that does not address self-neglect in statute, and although our community-based agencies do great work in supporting individuals once identified as self-neglecting, this issue is growing and needs more systemic focus, so our hope is that the work on this report will guide us forward in a proactive way. This report is due July 1, 2022, which we believe will give the work group enough time to develop a thorough report for the legislature.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before the committee, and please reach out with any additional questions to Commissioner Hutt or myself.

Submitted by:
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