



formerly Vermont Protection & Advocacy
(800) 834-7890 (Toll Free)
(802) 229-1355 (Voice)
(802) 229-2603 (TTY)
(802) 229-1359 (Fax)

141 Main Street, Suite # 7, Montpelier, VT 05602

Date: June 9, 2020
To: Sen. Ginny Lyons, Chair, Senate Committee on Health & Welfare
From: Ed Paquin, Disability Rights Vermont
In Re.: Funding for Attendant Services

The COVID-19 Pandemic has profoundly affected the lives of people with disabilities. The isolation has been especially hard for many who depend on long term care services that must be delivered in person. They have had to adapt to new protocols around infection prevention and their worlds have closed in as contact with outside social contacts have been limited. DRVT has received calls from some who have lost hours of service, most likely because of the difficulty of maintaining our essential workforce of people delivering personal attendant services.

We understand that you are grappling with an incredible array of serious needs but also, thankfully, have substantial emergency federal assistance. DRVT would hope that you consider using some of these funds, or any available state dollars, to lift the “freeze” on the Participant Directed Attendant Services Program (PDAC) which allows people with serious physical disabilities to employ family members. It only makes sense to utilize and support the assistance that may be within the household and not to rely on an already stressed workforce that must be incredibly careful in all their interactions with a number of vulnerable clients.

There are many reasons why the PDAC program deserves your support. Beyond meeting some very basic needs the program can act to equalize an individual’s access what our society has to offer.

- Individuals with serious physical disabilities often need assistance with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs) like eating, toileting and bathing and with Instrumental Activities of Daily Living (IADLs) like cooking, cleaning and meal preparation. Vermont does have a variety of programs that assist with these needs that are referred to as Attendant Care or Personal Care Services.
- Most of these programs are funded through Medicaid and hence have strict income and asset limits.

- There are people with serious physical disabilities who require some degree of assistance, but who are otherwise quite capable of work and of other ways of participating in the life of our community.
- Vermont, through the Department of Disabilities and Independent Living's (DAIL) Attendant Services Program (ASP), runs PDAC with General Funds, which is designed to be more flexible than Medicaid programs. PDAC very strictly allots hours of service to an individual, but allows the individual to employ family members or others of their choosing to provide the care. It does not require an individual to meet Medicaid's income and assets limits, though it has required that individuals be screened for qualifying for Medicaid in order to minimize costs to the State.
- The PDAC program allows a person with a disability to work without worrying about having to limit their income for fear of losing basic assistance with ADLs and IADLs. In effect, this is the means by which it helps to equalize their access to the opportunities that society offers to the rest of us.
- The program currently costs the State roughly \$2.7 million and serves around 40 people, a declining number, because the program has not allowed new beneficiaries for four years. The Administration's FY'21 budget proposed to save about \$180,000 through attrition in the coming fiscal year. That is mostly by people either moving to other, Medicaid funded programs, or by dying.
- DRVT believes that rather than using the money saved by attrition, PDAC could enroll new individuals, giving them the freedom to work and to live a more economically secure life. Resources available through Federal COVID relief could also help for the short term.
- Over a lifetime, the support of PDAC could forestall the incredible cost of nursing home level of care. By allowing a person to work and earn, society gains a taxpayer very likely to contribute in greater ways than one who is always trying to make sure not to exceed limits that endanger Medicaid eligibility.

Your consideration of this use of funds could assist a few young, disabled individuals to build a career rather than a life of dependence!

We thank you for your consideration.