

VERMONT LEGAL AID, INC.

OFFICE OF THE HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

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Office of the Health Care Advocate

2023 Funding Request

The HCA's requests an increase of \$270,000 to offset 6 years of Level Funding by the State, as well as an additional increase of \$120,000 to hire an additional attorney to support HCA's increased responsibilities, total requested increase of \$390,000.

The Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA) represents all Vermonters. We provide critical help to individuals and families navigating the health care system and represent Vermonters at health care regulatory proceedings and health policy deliberations throughout state government.

The HCA has been level funded for six straight years while the cost of living, especially the cost of staff health insurance, has continuously increased. As the health care landscape has gotten more complex, the HCA has had to expand its efforts. We cannot fully meet Vermonters' growing needs without a funding increase.

Our advocacy has resulted in real, tangible benefits to Vermonters. Two examples from the past year:

- Successfully advocated for Act 48: The Immigrant Health Insurance Plan, which expanded health insurance access for Vermont children and pregnant women who were ineligible for Medicaid due to their immigration status.
- Recommended that the Legislature consider dividing the individual and small group marketplace due to the increased individual market federal subsidies. We project that Vermont small businesses will **save over \$15 million** in 2022 based on this legislative action.

Every Vermonter is eligible to get free assistance from the HCA's Helpline. Our experienced and skilled, team guides Vermonters through the complex and evolving health care landscape. In the past six years, our Helpline assisted over 23,000 Vermonters and saved Vermonters millions of dollars in reduced bills and added benefits.

Proposed Additional HCA Attorney: Our four-person policy team is working hard to fulfill our ever-increasing duties in a regulatory landscape that is constantly in flux. While maintaining our traditional advocacy for Vermonters, we need to increase our capacity to hear from diverse groups of Vermonters to better guide our policy work. This attorney would also dedicate time to the advocacy team's legal research needs and serve as a bridge between the advocacy and policy teams.

As the cost of health care continues to outpace Vermonters' wages, the HCA's work on behalf of families who cannot afford the care they need is increasingly important. We hope you will join in supporting the Office of the Health Care Advocate by approving our funding request.

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