

**Home Access Program
Vermont Center for Independent Living
House Appropriations Testimony
February 19, 2021**

Ordinarily, I would be sitting in front of your Committee, microphones in place, the State House buzzing with activity. This year, as we are all aware, is so very different.

Please accept the following testimony for your consideration:

My name is Patricia Tedesco and I coordinate the Home Access Program at the Vermont Center for Independent Living. On behalf of our peers throughout our state, we are grateful for your long standing support for our program and the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board.

VCIL provides accessibility modifications for Vermonters who have permanent physical disabilities so they can remain in their homes and live more independently.

At the end of this narrative, you will find photos and stories of people who have benefited from this important program. You will hear from Vermonters like Bernadette, a 74 year old woman from Milton who has suffered a stroke and has COPD, recently shared her story with us:

“Getting in and out of the tub was extremely hard and I have fallen many times. My husband passed recently and left me far in debt. There was no way I could have done this on my own. Before I received the bathroom modification, I had to hang on to my towel rack and hope I didn't slip. Now that I have a modified bathroom, I can get in and out with ease. I have a seat and rails, in case I feel weak. ... You have made my life much more manageable living alone.”

Taking a shower or getting in and out of our homes easily is something perhaps most of us don't think twice about. However for the people we help, these issues are a daily struggle.

VCIL is requesting you support the Governor's budget request for a total of \$34.8 million to VHCB, including \$20 million in one-time investments, \$10.8 from the Property Transfer Tax, and \$4 million in the Capital Bill.

The average cost of a project through VCIL is about \$10,000, compared to about \$97,000 a year to live in a nursing home. Our program is evidence based - it is saving the state money in the human services budget. Also, this funding trickles down to give local contractors, and their skilled craftspeople, good-paying jobs doing home modifications throughout the state.

With the traditional funding levels between \$425 and \$475 thousand dollars from VHCB and \$100 thousand dollars from DAIL, our program is able to help with about 50 home modifications. The housing bond funding achieved the goal for VCIL – to reduce the wait list. However, with no “shot in the arm” of additional funding, we simply do not have the resources to help the many families in need around the state.

We work vigilantly to collaborate with partners and funders to reduce the cost of each project, however, right now we have 45 people on our wait list – and with applications coming in steadily – we have already allocated our current funding which goes through September 30, 2021. And so it goes.

Since our funding depends in large part on VHCB's appropriation, we ask you to provide them with full statutory funding for FY 22.

Thank you for your time, I know you have difficult decisions to make.

Submitted by Patricia Tedesco
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“Before I received the bathroom modification, I had to take a sponge bath and I had a very hard time getting into the bathroom. Now that I have a modified bathroom, I can take a shower with my wheelchair or my Hoyer [lift]. Now my wheelchair fits into my bathroom. ... I also want to say thank you

very much for all your help ... and knowledge they gave to us and for all their kindness to me and my family.” Barbara Svoboda, Lyndonville **(Caledonia County)**



“With this program's help I can now go outside anytime I want. I feel free to come and go as I please. Before I received the ramp, I had to stay in the house all the time except for my medical appointments. I am so very happy. Now that I have a ramp, I can go outside when I want.

... I also want to say I would not have known about this program if it wasn't for Franklin Home Health.” Jeffrey Mott, St. Albans City **(Franklin County)**



"I applied to VCIL's Home Access Program because I could not access my bathroom at all because I had a stroke and lost use of my left side and require a wheelchair. Before I received the bathroom modification, I had to receive bed baths or go to other accessible facilities to shower. ... this program will help you live with dignity and live independently and keep you from having to live in a nursing home.

"Their funding should be increased to eliminate their waiting list. The (staff) are compassionate, competent individuals. ... I am

sincerely grateful for VCIL's assistance." William Vetter, Bennington (**Bennington County**)



"I have arthritis and now walk with a walker. I knew that I couldn't afford a new ramp. Before I received the ramp, I walked up the old ramp which was very steep. I had severe pain in my hip and lower back. I would also have to stop halfway up the ramp to help alleviate the pain. Now that I have a [new] ramp, I can go up and down it

without all that pain and i don't have to stop. It made a big difference. ... I also want to say COVER [Home Repair] in White River Jct. did a wonderful job on the ramp and they were very nice people. I want to thank everybody." Gail Derosier, Springfield (**Windsor County**)



"Before I received my bathroom modification, I had to be very careful, the floor was rotted away, the tub was broke in several places, I patched it but it kept breaking and cracking. Now that I have a modified bathroom, I can feel safe in my bathroom and in the shower. If someone doesn't know about VCIL's Home Access Program yet, I would tell them what they did for me and that they couldn't meet nicer folks. They are caring, understanding, very helpful people--all of them." Reg Dailey, Barton **(Orleans County)**



"I applied to VCIL's Home Access Program because I was having extreme difficulty in getting in and out of my shower. Once I finally got in over the side of the tub, there was very little room to move around and with only one grab bar, I was afraid of falling. ... Now that I have a

modified bathroom, I can easily walk into my shower whenever and as many times as I want in a day with no struggles or fear. Many grab bars and plenty of room. ... I also want to say excellent teamwork, everyone, from start to finish." Janice Lacey, Walden **(Caledonia County)**