



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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Comments in favor of funds to address the workforce crisis in home and community-based services through the designated and specialized services agencies (DA/SSAs)

Dear Chairs Kitchel and Hooper and Members of Senate and House Appropriations Committees,

Thank you for taking testimony regarding the 2023 budget. The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council (the DD Council) is writing in support of a 10% increase in the State's funding of our designated and specialized service agencies to recruit and retain critical staff.

Self-advocates and their families tell us about the devastating impact that current staff shortages have had on Vermonters with disabilities.

- We spoke with the mother of a young man who uses supporting typing to communicate. This requires a highly specialized support provider. This gentleman has not had access to basic communication for over 18 months. This is isolating and, frankly, dangerous as it leads to anger and despair for this individual.
 - Numerous families report that their family member with a disability has lost skills during recent months because they do not have staff to help them engage their community and practice independent living skills. This is not only very frustrating for the individual, but costly in that it raises the future support needs of the individual.
 - We have spoken with many parents whose family member has gone into psychiatric crisis because of the lack of stability and support in their lives. Again, this leads to an expensive placement in a therapeutic group home, if – and this is not guaranteed – providers can be found to staff the placement. In one case, the family member was sent out of state, a frightening experience for this person and his family. If no placement is
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available, parents tell us that they are on their own to manage a distressing and volatile situation.

This is just a small sampling of the stories behind the numbers that Vermont Care Partners have shared:

A 20% vacancy rate across the community agency system;
88 individuals waiting for safe, supported living with a care provider; and
342 children and 437 adults waiting for services.

We hope that the Committee will act boldly to address the unprecedented needs of our DA/SSA's.

Thank you for your consideration.