

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: Marla Simpson - Pathways Vermont Support Line

Dear Leaders in State of Vermont, USA:

First of all, thank you so much for reading my written testimony. Gladly appreciated! During my work on the Pathways Vermont Support Line, (VSL), I've literally talked with thousands of people, all over the U.S.A. (The first apx. 3.5 years of VSL we were Nation-Wide). In more recent years, VSL only takes calls or texts from people in VT over the age of 18.

Thus, I have very far-reaching insights into the needs & pulse of exactly what is going on for Vermonters. Due to privacy & confidentiality rules, I can't offer identifying info. about anyone. However, as someone with decades of lived experience, combined with my professional lessons/connections, I am able to share the heart & soul of many Vermonters' lives/needs/traumas, etc.

I have a Master's Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling from Antioch University New England (graduated in 2009). I'd received a full TURRELL scholarship to Middlebury College back in the day.....a totally wonderful experience. (I graduated from Midd. College in 1995). My expertise is in Positive Psychology & Intentional Peer Support (IPS).

I'll stick with the basics of human needs, as so clearly defined by Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs (originally, a pyramid):

- 1) SAFETY (Safety first!)
- 2) FOOD (Healthy Nutrition) (I'm against GMO food; would prefer that organic food be more accessible & less expensive).

(In years past, until last year, I had to go to food shelves for a vast majority of my food.....it is my understanding that the ex-wife of AMAZON CEO J.B. donated a lot of \$ to VT for these food needs, just last year.....very kind & generous of her.....billions to "give away," & she so fortunately gave some to VT).

- 3) Shelter (HOUSING).....(The Adult Mental Health State Program Standing Committee [AMH SPSC] , AND the Mental Health Block Grant Planning Council [MHBG P.C.] BOTH, for several years now, have HOUSING as our #1 [NUMBER ONE PRIORITY].

This includes Pathways VT "Housing First" Model; Shelter Plus Care Vouchers [or whatever VT is currently using], Rental Vouchers, & assisted RENTAL PROGRAM \$\$\$ via the VT DESIGNATED MENTAL HEALTH AGENCIES. [DA's]

*****Without the rental assistance from the Clara Martin Center, Randolph, VT, I would've lost my housing years ago.....I am eternally grateful.

*****I've also lived & worked at a homeless shelter [now, transitional housing residential program].....for those unable to live independently, a group home, nursing home, or residential program can be very vital.....I myself much more prefer to live independently, in my own apartment.....have been in same home since 2004 with my therapy/service cat [he's the best ever & is now 3.5 years old.....I'll write about PET THERAPY/SERVICE ANIMALS later in this testimony.

- 4) ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE (I applaud VT, with all my heart & soul, for being NUMBER 1 [#1 in the U.S.A.] for access to healthcare!

I support MEDICARE FOR ALL (UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE).....I have total "public insurance," a 100% LIFESAVER.

I endorse, additionally, HOLISTIC HEALTH.....after a terrible auto accident, in '07, where my car was rear-ended from behind at 60 MPH, I relied only on CHIROPRACTIC; therapeutic massage, & acupuncture to try to heal my body.....I'm in recovery, so avoided pain pills for this pain. My car insurance at the time covered this holistic care.....currently, I believe, only Chiropractic is covered under a public health insurance plan.....every day I experience minor to moderate (sometimes worse) chronic physical pain.

5) SUBSTANCE USE TREATMENT & PREVENTION: AA & NA don't charge any \$ at all to join. "There are no dues or fees." After attending thousands of AA meetings for the past 18 years, most all VT meetings just accept a dollar or so, per mtg. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, the vast majority of meetings join via ZOOM or PHONE.....Currently, it is my understanding, that only the BRATTLEBORO RETREAT accepts DE-TOX PATIENTS. VT has closed: Valley Vista? Is that correct? I know MAPLE LEAF CLOSED.

This leaves barely any options for Vermonters seeking treatment to be either clean and/or SOBER.....With the OPIATE CRISIS & sky-rocketing SALES OF ALCOHOL (SALES UP 40% in VT).....plus all of the other "street drugs," ADDICTION REMAINS A HUGE CRISIS for VERMONTERS of ALL AGES. Marijuana is a drug, too. I realize it can be used medicinally, but it's still very mind-altering, & psychologically (& some studies have shown physical addiction, too). ADDICTION does NOT DISCRIMINATE. It affects all levels of socio-economic; ethnic, & class groups in the WORLD. It is also possibly LETHAL, & CHILDREN growing up in substance use households often go on to imitate the habits of the household.....addiction "genes" exist. But it can also be the environment of a person/people. VT must seek, ASAP, cost-effective ways of treating, healing, & erasing the stigma of any kind of harmful addictive behavior/patterns/dependency.

5) JOBS/CAREERS/&\$\$\$: With so many un-employed, struggling to put food on the table, etc. etc. etc. the BIDEN/HARRIS 1.9 TRILLION COVID-19 RELIEF PACKAGE MUST REACH VERMONTERS.

~I am also aware that 25 million dollars came to VT a few short months ago to help with HOUSING. THANK YOU!

~The OPTION to "WORK FROM HOME" must stay in place, if ever possible.....[I do this.....it is SAFER.....no driving in un-safe conditions.....less wear-&-tear on the vehicles, the VT roads & highways.....better for MOTHER EARTH as people are not using as much gasoline.....polluting our precious AIR, etc. [this brings me to my next point].....

6) COVID-19 VACCINES.....KUDOS to Gov. Scott for being a solid leader during this CRISIS.....Senator Bernie Sanders, Congressman Peter Welch, & Senator Patrick Leahy, also, all OUTSTANDING LEADERS for this "BRAVE LITTLE STATE of VERMONT"GRATITUDE.

7) ANIMAL RIGHTS/PET THERAPY/SERVICE PETS/HUMANE FARMS & SAFE & KIND HOMES FOR THE ANIMALS

~As a life-long ANIMAL LOVER/FRIEND....."ANIMALS ARE FAMILY"the Humane Societies NEED MORE FUNDING/HELP, too.....My "feline son," has literally helped keep me OUT of a psychiatric ward!.....Last year, & also recent years, I came very close to a bi-polar I nervous breakdown.....I used the VT Support Line, the Clara Martin Center, my feline son/service cat.....& the loving help of my "spiritual husband" to stay SANE, & NOT got to the E.R. [Emergency Room]. "It takes a village to support someone, very often."

8) THE ARTS & HUMANITIES (My background prior to PSYCHOLOGY was totally in the ARTS.....many with mental health conditions/diagnoses are very CREATIVE.....I've taught ART THERAPY in the past.....the therapy dogs, EXERCISING, & art therapy were my ultimate favorites when I was hospitalized for psychosis/alternate realities.....clinical depression.....mania, etc.

9) SUICIDE PREVENTION/EDUCATION.....Suicide Ideation & sometimes even suicide attempts run rampant in VT, SADLY.....VT needs to de-stigmatize talking about thoughts of dying.....the VAST majority of people don't want to actually "die," they just have so much TRAUMA, PAIN, PTSD, ETC. they can't deal with life anymore.....DMH (VT Dept. of Mental Health) in the past couple

of months, or so, was granted 1.8 million for suicide prevention & education). Let's make sure all of this funding coming to VT reaches AS MANY PEOPLE as humanly possible, please! Thank you!
10) PATHWAYS VT "HOUSING FIRST" MODEL only needs 2.5 MILLION to reach every single COUNTY in VT.....RUTLAND COUNTY has especially been going through severely tough times, for many decades, only getting worse.....the Housing First Model is VERY COST EFFECTIVE.....it helps keep people out of expensive E.R. Rooms.....even jails or prisons.....I fully support all means & ways to effectively safely house Vermonters.....& I also believe in CLEANLINESS. Just FYI.

Finally, to summarize, Vermonters are more ISOLATED & LONELY than EVER BEFORE in MODERN HISTORY.....we must keep the VT SUPPORT LINE open & well-staffed 24/7. AND the CRISIS TEXT LINE, as well as the D.A.'s CRISIS LINES.....DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STATS ARE ALSO WAY UP.....SAFETY FIRST.....I do support the POLICE, TOO.....AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS/TEACHERS/SCHOOLS/VT AS A WHOLE.....I could go on & on but will wrap this up!

****It is excellent that those with mental health conditions/crises/issues/problems, etc. can ACCESS CONNECTION & SUPPORT in VT! I am living, breathing, walking, ALIVE TESTIMONY to VT, & ALL of these things!

THANK YOU THANK YOU THANK YOU.....It indeed is a GIFT to be HEALTHY & ALIVE.....I ALSO FULLY SUPPORT keeping SOCIAL SECURITY [SSI & SSDI].....the POST OFFICE.....LIBRARIES.....HELPING INDIVIDUALS.....PREGNANT WOMEN (healthy pre-natal care).....& I endorse PLANNED PARENTHOOD, too!

Vermont, USA has some of the most cutting-edge, BEST people & LEADERS in the WORLD! WARM THANKS & GRATITUDE!