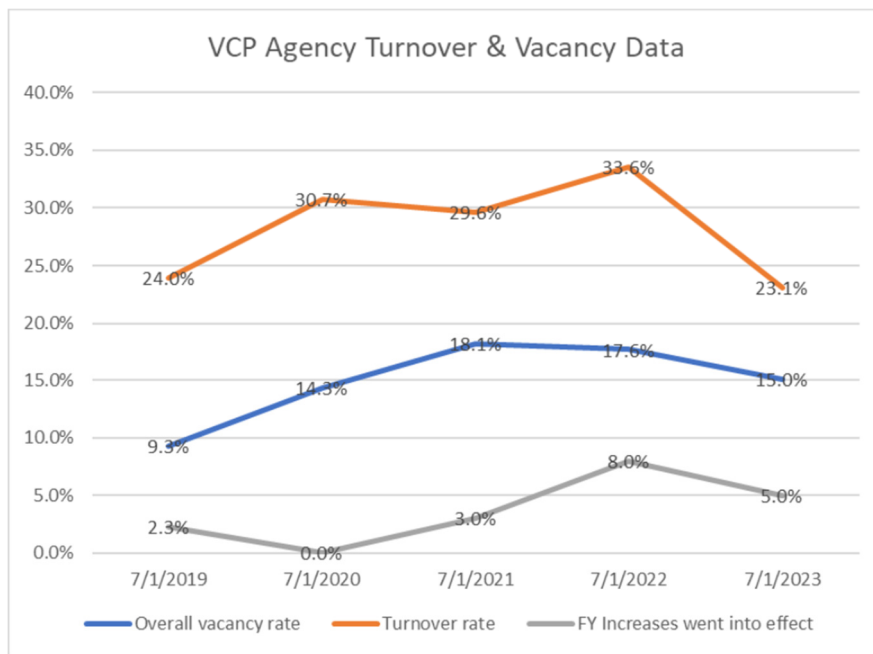


The Vermont House Committee on Appropriations and Senate Committee on Appropriations
Request for a 6.5 percent Rate Increase for Designated and Specialized Service Agencies

Beth Sightler, Executive Director, Champlain Community Services

February 13, 2024

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this year's budget. I am Beth Sightler, Executive Director of Champlain Community Services (CCS), a Developmental Disabilities Service agency in Colchester. We are part of Vermont Care Partners. Our network is asking for a **6.5 percent rate increase (\$14,616,695 in GF)**. Legislative support over the past years has improved our ability to keep people safe, housed, and receiving the support and care they need. Below is a table showing the effect of your investment (gray line) in our turnover and vacancy rates:



I was absolutely stunned that there is not a recommended increase to providers this year; no increase means a cut. Our system is under extreme workforce, system reform, and acuity pressures while we are a lifeline for thousands of vulnerable Vermonters.

Our 6.5 percent ask is not arbitrary. The agency CFOs conducted an analysis of current factors to maintain services for vulnerable Vermonters. They looked at five categories: salaries, health insurance, other fringe, other insurance, and all other operating expenses.

Our 6.5 percent increase is based on:

- A 5% salary increase based on the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics;
- An average projected health insurance increase of 16.6%;
- An average projected increase of 7% for other fringe;
- General/liability/auto/property insurance projected to increase an average of 10.8%; and
- Other operating projected to increase 3.3% based on New England Consumer Price Index, updated through October.

Last week CCS was recognized as one of **Vermont's Best Places to Work** for the sixth year in a row. We, like all network agencies, are doing everything we can to keep our staff stable and supported in a difficult workforce environment. However, if we cannot pay them fairly and give them moderate raises, they will not stay.

- CCS hires frontline staff at \$20.00 an hour. Colleagues in our field - but outside our system - are now paying between \$25 and \$30/hr for direct services. How can we keep people in services safe if we cannot keep our staff?
- A typical home provider for a person with complex needs earns about \$82 a day. On average their pay has increased \$14/day over the last fifteen years. This is insufficient.
- At CCS 49 percent of people in services have a co-occurring mental health diagnosis, 55 percent have complex medical needs, and 45 percent have a history of trauma.
- Sometimes when people hear about our work, they say “That’s such important work, thank you for doing it”. It's not enough to love our work and know it’s important, staff and shared living providers must earn a livable and competitive wage. People taking care of people need to be paid fairly.

I understand you have many pressures, and you face a budget that has insufficient funding for all the needs. However, our system is in a critical position, and we need regular, annual investments. We need your help to keep people safe, housed, supported, and working in our communities. Thank you.

