

Testimony for the Governor's 2025 Budget

Good evening, my name is Kathryn Titus, from Colchester. I am the Director of Operations for Cathedral Square, a service oriented affordable housing organization that operates two licensed Assisted Living communities and houses over 1,000 Vermonters in affordable senior housing with SASH services.

My thanks to the committee for the chance to testify on the Governor's 2025 budget today and for the investments you made last year in the community-based long-term care sector. These were hugely impactful, but continued investment is essential.

The Governor's proposed FY 2025 budget does not adequately address the current Long Term Care crisis in our state. In the 2023 rate study released by the Department of Vermont Health Access, it was recommended that Enhanced Residential Care Medicaid reimbursement rates be increased 13%, 37% and 60% based on corresponding levels of care. We received a 4% increase for these rates last year. This was simply not enough to sustain the escalating operating expenses that we are forced to endure to safely house and care for Vermonters.

It is a critical time for older and disabled Vermonters who have limited access to skilled and reliable Long Term Care services. Our friends, neighbors and family members who are unable to complete basic activities of daily living such as bathing, meal prep and medication management depend on the support from home-based Choices for Care, residential care and assisted living communities like Cathedral Square. Our two assisted living communities are currently providing homes and services for 44 residents, 91% of whom are on Medicaid.

With facilities closing their doors all around us, we are very concerned about what happens to our residents if we are forced to continue struggling with prolonged underfunding. We respectfully request your committee consider increasing the Long-Term Medicaid reimbursement rates as proposed in the 2023 rate study. We also ask that you establish annual Medicaid rate increases, ensuring stability and sustainability. Without this, providers like Cathedral Square will have to reduce capacity at a time when older Vermonters need housing, care and services more than ever.

My thanks to the committee for your time and attention to this critical matter and for the opportunity to speak today.