



Vermont Businesses
for Social Responsibility

VBSR Support of Section 9, H.721

February 15, 2024

Our Mission: To leverage the power of business for positive social and environmental impact

Our Vision: A just, thriving, and transformative economy for all people and the planet

From: Kristin Warner, Public Policy Manager, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
To: Representative Houghton, Chair of House Healthcare Committee and Representative Lanpher, Chair of House Appropriations
Re: Support Section 9 of H.721

Dear Chair Houghton and Chair Lanpher,

I'm writing on behalf of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (VBSR) and our 700 member businesses across Vermont in support of section 9 of H.721. Our business-led organization supports expanding Medicaid-funded programs for older adults and Vermonters with disabilities, starting with the Medicare Savings Program. Our members have long articulated our values to include health access, equity, and economic security – and section 9 of this legislation reflects these values.

We do not live in an equal world. To this day, women, people of color, and those with a disability are structurally and systemically held back from economic opportunity and prosperity. The gender pay gap for women over a lifetime produces staggering figures. It is widely reported that women earn between 79% and 85% of what their male counterparts earn. When this wage inequality is multiplied by a lifetime, women have less access to capital, retirement, social security, and Medicare benefits. According to TIME Magazine, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has calculated that a typical woman who works from age 16 to 70 would make \$590,000 less than a man working an identical span. U.S. Department of Labor data shows that black workers get paid 24 cents less per hour than their white counterparts. These disparities signify inequitable access to health care for older adults in the Medicaid program.

Campaigns, labor unions, progressive employers, and think tanks calling for equal pay have long called out these disparities. However, the impacts of these differences are still embedded in the structures of society. The Vermont Legislature has the opportunity to disrupt this harmful and unjust trend by passing the proposal to expand Vermont's Medicare Savings Program during this session. By doing so, Vermonters who have been systematically held back from over a lifetime of earnings will have new access to care comparable with their male, able-bodied, white counterparts. Section 9 of H.721 is a clear and actionable step to take that allows older adults and Vermonters with disabilities access to health care that they need and have been structurally prevented from receiving at no fault of their own.

VBSR members from all sectors regularly cite health care as an essential area for improvement in Vermont and ask that you join us in supporting this legislation. As always, we invite further dialogue on this critical issue. We thank you for your time and dedication on behalf of all Vermonters.