

Good morning my name is Sarah Launderville and I'm the President of the [Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights](#) and the Executive Director of the [Vermont Center for Independent Living](#) and I have a psychiatric disability.

Founded in 1974, the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights (VCDR) is comprised of member organizations including local and statewide organizations of Vermonters with disabilities, parents, advocates and service providers.

Thank you all for hearing our testimony today. In past years, some of you may remember that Disability Awareness Day was always a well-attended event where hundreds of people with disabilities throughout Vermont would come to the statehouse and connect with one another, sharing about their lived experience with legislators. It also allowed for people to come together to share stories with one another and make connections. We hope that in the future we can return to a place where people can gather and work together.

At VCDR we're very aware that the pandemic continues to effect folks with disabilities at much higher rates and we're hoping the legislature continues to help underscore the importance of not moving away from important supports while people with disabilities continue to need them. Ensuring that people with disabilities have equitable access to their communities has always been a civil rights issue, but right in this moment we are looking for leaders to not only talk about the pandemic like it was in the past but recognize that people with disabilities are still at high risk. Since basic needs like masking and testing have become politically polarized we're looking for leadership to help with reminders that those most effected are the ones to look to for stories of lack of access.

VCDR has released our 2023 priorities list and I've sent it along with my testimony today.

One priority I'd like to highlight is our hope to see the Participant Directed Attendant Services Program through the Vermont Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living be opened back up. PDAC is a program that is vitally important and is funded by the Vermont's general fund revenues. When developed and even today, it is a forward-thinking program that allows individuals in need of attendant services to have access to the program without spending down assets. This is important, especially for individuals with disabilities looking for employment opportunities and access to this program may mean the difference for someone to choose to work full or part time. Funding has been frozen for several years and the program needs to accept new applications. This program can mean the difference between Vermonters having to impoverish themselves to be eligible for another attendant services program or retaining employment and thus maintaining their independence. There are many issues that the disability community is interested in and are in support of including an occupational therapist interstate compact, legal assistance for families needing support in special education, the ongoing workforce crisis including support worker and attendants, legislation increasing community and peer supports and decreasing institutionalization. Housing, transportation, employment and equitable healthcare remain at the top of our priority lists. We welcome additional conversations throughout the session and again, appreciate your time and attention to these important issues.