

My name is Gail Stevenson and I am a long-serving member of the Howard Center's Board of Trustees. I am also the parent of an adult who has received services for many years. I am here today in support of a Medicaid rate increase of 6.5% (\$14,616,695 in General Fund) for the Designated & Specialized Service Agencies that provide essential state services to Vermonters.

I would like to thank the legislature for their ongoing support of the DA/SSA system. The funding increases we received in FY23 and FY24 helped to begin to turn the curve on vacancy rates in our programs and improve retention rates. This, in turn, allowed us to provide services to more Vermonters while ensuring care from high-quality providers. Vacancies in our system of care have a ripple effect on individuals and families, communities, and the overall health of Vermont. It is clear that the legislature recognizes and is supportive of those who do this valuable and important work.

As mentioned, my daughter has long received invaluable support through developmental services. This support has allowed her (and me) to live lives of value and meaning. But I know, both from my Board service and from personal experience over many years, that:

- Staff are overstretched, underpaid and exhausted.
- Waiting time to access services is too long, which often leads to underserved people spiraling into crisis. When they do receive services, it is often a small part of what they need and are entitled to.
- Investing in community-based services is actually a prudent investment as it takes the pressure off more expensive hospitals, nursing homes and crisis services.

To support Vermonters, the state should continue its investment in the DA/SSA system. A Medicaid rate increase of 6.5% will support our ability to continue to address critical needs in the system so we can better serve the growing needs in our beloved state.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Gail Stevenson

Parent and Howard Center Board member