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Sent: Tuesday, April 18, 2023 3:27 PM

To: jkitchel@leg.state.vt.us; aperchlik@leg.state.vt.us; rawestman@gmail.com; rstarr@leg.state.vt.us; rsears@leg.state.vt.us; pbaruth@leg.state.vt.us; Senator Ginny Lyons <vlyons@leg.state.vt.us>

Cc: nlangweil@leg.state.vt.us; sbarrett@leg.state.vt.us

Subject: [External] PARENT REQUEST - 10% MEDICAID RATE INCREASE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES

[External]

Dear Members of the *Senate Committee on Appropriations*:

We are writing to request the *Senate Committee on Appropriations* prioritize funding in the budget to help relieve parents of adult children with developmental disabilities from carrying the burden of the Developmental Services staffing crisis (i.e. high turnover and a 20+% vacancy rate). We are the parents and guardians of our 25 year old son with developmental disabilities, who lives with us because there is no other housing option for him, and receives adult services from our local designated agency. Our son has often been described clinically as “complex” given his multiple diagnoses and needs, but he is an amazing individual who desires an opportunity to live with peers in a safe community with the appropriate supports for him to be successful and not live with his parents. ***The current staffing crisis in Developmental Services has had a negative impact on our son’s emotional health, and has impacted the family greatly due to minimal services/supports being available to meet his needs.***

We ask the *Senate Appropriations Committee* to prioritize for this budget cycle:

- i. **Approval of a 10% Medicaid Rate increase that will directly support the wages of HCBS direct support professionals (DSP) to help relieve the burden parents are carrying.** To be successful, our son requires minimal transitions and well-trained, highly qualified staff to effectively work with him and support his developmental and mental health needs. ***Since entering adult services in July 2019, our son has experienced 5 Service Coordinator changes, 3 Employment Advisor changes, and has received no community supports (12 hours/week budgeted) in more than 10 months, and we have been unable to hire a sufficient number of qualified respite providers due to the tight labor market.*** As aging parents, our lives are busy providing support with transportation to and from work 3 days/week, ongoing training with life skills, time in the community, ensuring his safety both at home and in the community, weekly medical appointments, social outings, and feel like we are carrying the bulk of the load as his caregivers. Although we are available because we are both “retired”, we do not know how long this can be maintained. We fully understand the DSP staffing challenges the DA’s/SSA’s are faced with and are grateful for the 8% raise and additional program funding approved in the last legislative session that stopped the exiting of DSP workers, but vacancies remain. Although a sizeable rate increase last year, unfortunately it only kept up with inflation and ***more funding is needed now given the projected inflation rate of 5%.***

- ii. **Require a process to be implemented for an annual rate review for Home and Community Based Services** as is done in other Health sectors (i.e. nursing homes, health care, hospitals, etc.) to ensure a livable wage and encourage recruitment and retention of direct support professionals. ***We know that DSP workers are a valued essential worker for our family and Developmental Services has been underfunded for way too long.***
- iii. Quality oversight positions are needed for Developmental Services.

When the Brandon Training School closed in 1993, the state assured families that our disabled adult children would be adequately supported. Unfortunately, that is not the case today. We thank you for your time and consideration of this budget feedback to address the needs of this vulnerable population and we know Vermont can do better.

- Ed & Jenn Townley on behalf of our son Bennett (Williston), *Family Member of the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative (DDHI)*