



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: Senate Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs
RE: Housing for People with Disabilities
FROM: Susan Aranoff, J.D., Senior Planner and Policy Analyst
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The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council (hereafter “VTDDC”) is a statewide board created by the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights (hereafter “the DD Act”), first adopted by Congress in 1970. Our constituents have an important stake in the cost, quality, and availability of housing and long term services and supports. An estimated 86,000 Vermonters experience a developmental disability as defined by the DD Act, with approximately 5,100 receiving some type of community-based support through Medicaid.

VTDDC is charged under federal law with engaging at the state level in “advocacy, capacity building and systems change activities that... contribute to the coordinated, consumer-and-family-centered, consumer-and-family directed, comprehensive system that includes needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.”

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council members – like your Committee- come from all around the State. Amanda Bianchi, has a developmental disability and lives with her aging father in Swanton. Crista Yagian and her son Nate live in Guidhall. Our Council Chair, Anastasia Douglass, Esq. lives with her husband David, a D.O.C. discharge planner in Barre town. They have 3 young children and have moved their family once to get their children the services they need.

Havah Walther- in Hartland, joined the Council in large part to advocate for her sister to have the kind of services and housing choices she had in Rhode Island- here in Vermont.

The Council develops 5 year plans and legislative priorities and platforms.

The Council is laser-focused on the need service supported housing for adults with disabilities.

Although the Council is housed in the Agency of Human Services, we have a memorandum of understanding with AHS guaranteeing our independence. I am free therefore to advocate on behalf of Vermonters with disabilities and their family members, regardless of any positions of the Governor or AHS.

Vermont Needs Service Supported Housing for Adults with Disabilities

In Act 186 of 2022, the Legislature commissioned research regarding the need for service supported housing in Vermont. According to the Act 186 Housing Report, the State of Vermont needs 602 additional units of service supported housing to meet the needs of adults with disabilities in Vermont today. [Read the Housing Brief here.](#)

Act 186 also funded three planning grants for pilot projects. However, we are not going to solve the supported housing shortage one project at a time.

Last year, Senator Lyons suggested we try to find a pipeline for service supported housing to avoid a project by project or unit by unit approach.

The House added people with disabilities to 2 existing and successful pipelines – the VHIP and VHCB pipelines.

These policy changes are in H. 829. These policy changes do not include any earmarked funds or separate appropriations.

The ability to use VHIP to create new service supported housing for people with disabilities can be game changing for developers and will be life changing for people with disabilities.

According to testimony in the House, in the decade after the closing of Brandon- the VHCB developed 800 units of service supported housing. VHCB testified that with this

language added to its priorities, it would be able to actively solicit proposals for the development of service supported housing.

Sidenote about the Closing of the Brandon Closing School:

People often say that when Vermont closed the Brandon Training School, we were the second State to do so. I've said that. We say it as if Vermont closed Brandon because it was good idea.

Vermont closed Brandon for the same reason it eventually shuttered Woodside- Vermont closed Brandon because of a lawsuit brought on behalf of the people who lived there.

That lawsuit began in 1980 and was filed by Vermont Legal Aid's Developmental Disability Law Project- headed by a 20- something year old lawyer named Sally Fox.

I am here today standing on the shoulders of giants.

I am asking you to keep the promises made by the legislature and Governor Dean in 1993 when Brandon was closed.

The promises were made to the people who are here with me in the room today – and to their families.

The promise to provide housing and the supportive services necessary for people with disabilities to simply live safely in their communities.

These promises were made- and have not been kept.

Instead what we have now is – shared living providers- in Franklin – investigated for Medicaid fraud and abuse.

In hartland – where some one drowned

Seven days ads quotes

Adults- young adults- aging parents—all were promised housing in their communities- instead all are at risk of re-institutionalization in a nursing home or worse.

Conclusion

Please talk with Max Barrows and the advocates of Green Mountain Self-Advocates and the families who are part of the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative - the parent-run volunteer organization of over 100 Vermont families who need affordable, permanent, service-supported housing for their family members.

In their stories, you will hear that hundreds of Vermont adults with disabilities need housing choices. Hundreds of adults are living with their parents when they would rather live independently or with their friends.

Many of the families that make up DDH consist of aging parents- average age of 65- caring for their adult children, average age of 27. Their children have an intellectual or developmental disability and many of them have very significant support needs. These families urgently need housing options that address their needs.

Thank you for listening and thank for your service.