

## **Home Access Program Vermont Center for Independent Living**

Prepared for the Joint Public Hearing – Testimony – February 15, 2023

VT Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs  
VT House Committee on General and Housing

My name is Patricia Tedesco and I am the Program Services Manager at the Vermont Center for Independent Living (“VCIL”).

VCIL is a state-wide non-profit established in 1979 to help people with disabilities. VCIL Home Access Program provides housing modifications for low-income Vermonters who have permanent physical disabilities so they can remain in their homes and live more independently.

At the end of this narrative, you will find before and after photos and stories of people who have benefited from this important program. You will hear from Vermonters like **Rodney in Franklin County** who shared his story with us:

**“I had a lot of trouble getting in and out of my home because of the steps. I didn't feel safe going outside unless someone was there to help me. It was unsafe. Now that I have a ramp, I can come and go as I please. ... I also want to say **thanks for helping me get more of my independence back.**”**

Taking a shower or getting in and out of our homes easily is something perhaps most of us don't think twice about. However, for the people we help, these issues are a daily struggle.

I think we can all agree Vermont needs more housing. Vermont needs more affordable housing. But the other consideration is Vermont needs accessible housing. Universal design for new construction would build bathrooms that everyone can use, regardless if they currently have a disability, have a visitor who has a disability or may have a disability as they move through their life. As I always tell my almost 90-year-old parents: “You need a ramp BEFORE you need a ramp!”

We receive about a dozen applications a month from people who cannot access their bathrooms or enter easily into their homes. We also receive applications from elders who have moved into brand new senior housing, but the unit was built with a bathtub, rather than an accessible shower. It seems like such a waste of funding to remove a brand-new tub, but yet the person can't bathe without a shower. Again, this is where Universal Design comes in – making units accessible to all.

For as many projects as we are able to help fund, the waiting list does not seem to diminish. The need is high throughout the state.

Post-COVID, we have seen a significant strain on the availability of qualified contractors statewide. So while in some cases, the funding may be available to help an applicant with a bathroom modification, we struggle to find a contractor who can do the work.

As you move through all the requests and data and documents, please consider accessible housing to be a key ingredient in the success of Vermonters living independent lives and aging in place.

Thank you for your time and please contact us at any time for specific details or any additional information that may be helpful to you in your work.

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"I applied to VCIL's Home Access Program because it was getting difficult to transfer my daughter (3 years old) from the house to the car. I was having to carry her up and down rickety old stairs multiple times a day so she could access medical appointments, therapy appointments, preschool, and events/spaces within the community. As she grew to be over half my size and length, this became extremely difficult and unsafe for both of us. Now that I have a ramp, leaving the house is so easy!! ... We can go in and out multiple times a day with no problem. Life is so much more accessible for her and us. ... It has really added to our quality of life" As told by mom **Harlei, Woodstock (Windsor County)** Built by COVER Home Repair. Value of volunteer labor \$5,200.00; cost of materials \$2,758.64.



"... Since 2015 I had to use a walker. In the beginning, I was able to lift my walker while holding on the railing..., but after 2021 I could no longer do this. It got very difficult to handle getting out of the house. So, I only went out for appointments. Or carried out by EMTs. Now that I have a ramp, I can go for a walk which I can do now on my own. ... I also want to say a big thank you and appreciation to everyone involved." **Maureen, South Barre (Washington County)** Built by Central Vermont Habitat for Humanity. Value of volunteer labor \$3,525.00; cost of materials \$2,081.61.



"I applied for VCIL's Home Access Program because I could not take a shower, couldn't get in and out of the tub... I had to wash up in the sink. Now that I have a modified bathroom, I can do self-cleansing (take a shower) and get on and off the toilet easier." **Pam, Barton (Orleans County)**



"Before I received the ramp, I had to go up and down the steps... It was very hard. We came close to falling lots of times. Now that I have a ramp, I can go up and down on my own. ... I love it... I also want to say thank you for the nice people that came here and on the phone." **June, Springfield (Windsor County)**



"Before I received a ramp, I had to depend on someone to help me get down the stairs to enjoy life at the picnic table and to the car. ... Now that I have a ramp, I can pretty much do for myself now getting out and about. ... I also want to say VCIL has honest, dependable, reliable, knowledgeable people working for them. They certainly work hard for their clients." **Rodney, Shaftsbury (Bennington County)** Built by Bennington Habitat for Humanity. Value of volunteer labor \$1,750.00; cost of materials \$1,649.66.



"Before I received the bathroom modification, I had to take very few showers. ... Thank you so much. It's the best room in the house. I would have hugs for you!!" **Brenda, Springfield (Windsor County)**



"I had a lot of trouble getting in and out of my home because of the steps. I didn't feel safe going outside unless someone was there to help me. It was unsafe. Now that I have a ramp, I can come and go as I please. ... I also want to say thanks for helping me get more of my independence back." **Rodney, Swanton (Franklin County)**



"In the past 3 years I have fallen so much that I had anxiety every time I had to leave my home, but now I am more independent and feel happy to leave with my ramp. Before I received the ramp, I had to rely on my walker and husband and car door to get me down the steps and still fell several times. ... Now that I have a ramp, I can leave my house without anxiety of falling ... I feel more confident and independent. I also want to say the people who work for and with this program have a heart of gold and are my angels. Thank you for helping me feel like I got my life back by being made independent and safe." **Heather, St. Albans City (Franklin County)**



"... Now that I have a modified bathroom, I can remain safely on the first floor of our historic house. We sleep and live primarily in the downstairs only. ... Their contractors who bid on the job were well guided in their scope of work needed to comply with ADA requirements. ... VCIL was particularly resourceful in a post-COVID period when shortages of skilled contractors and materials became a major issue." **Lewis, Chester (Windsor County)**



"Now that I have a ramp, I can go out for rides with family members. I feel like a new person. I can go get the mail. I use the railings which makes me feel safe and I don't have to bend my knees, afraid of a bone breaking. I feel more independent. You made me happier and I feel like I'm not a burden to anyone. I get around on my own." **Phyllis, Burlington (Chittenden County)**