

Testimony for the Governor's 2026 Budget

Good afternoon, my name is Maria King, from Saint Albans. I am the Long Term Care Administrator for Cathedral Square, a service oriented affordable housing organization that operates two licensed Assisted Living communities. Cathedral Square Assisted Living and Memory Care at Allen Brook.

I would like to thank the committee for the opportunity to testify on the Governor's 2026 budget today.

It is critical for older and disabled Vermonters to have access to skilled and reliable Long Term Care services. Our friends, neighbors and family members who are unable to complete basic activities of daily living such as dressing, bathing, meal prep and medication management depend on the support from Vermont's skilled nursing, residential care and assisted living communities like Cathedral Square. Our two assisted living communities are currently providing homes and care services for 44 residents, with a capacity for 48.

We take pride in the **quality** of care and support we provide utilizing an evidence-based practice called the Best Friends Approach. Through this approach, staff learn our resident's life stories, take time to understand their individual situations, participate in meaningful engagement, and are dedicated to helping our residents feel loved, valued, safe and secure. We want to provide more older Vermonters who need this kind of care and housing but we cannot given our financial reality.

Over the last 6 years, 21 Long Term Care communities have closed, a total of 123 beds lost while Vermont's seniors encompass the fastest growing age-cohort in the state and the need for care is at its highest.

Simply put, the Governor's proposed FY 2026 budget does not adequately speak to the current Long-Term Care crisis we are facing. In order for communities like ours to continue to adequately and safely provide quality care to our older and disabled Vermonters, keep pace with inflation and support competitive staff wages, we respectfully request your committees to consider the following:

1. \$6 million in General Fund dollars for full implementation of the increases for Enhanced Residential Care (ERC) and home-based Choices for Care services as described in the February 15, 2023 DVHA rate study.
2. An inflationary adjustment of 4% to all long-term care reimbursement rates to reflect rising costs.

Without this, providers like Cathedral Square will have to continue to reduce capacity at a time when older Vermonters need our housing, care and services more than ever.

I would like to close by thanking the committees for your time and attention to this critical matter and for the opportunity to speak today.