

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Governor's proposed state budget for the fiscal year 2026.

My name is Paula, and I am co-owner of Our House Residential Care Homes in Rutland along with my husband Pat (Pasquale). We own and operate three Level 3 residential care homes, special care units for people with dementia in Rutland. We offer a home like environment to people who are on their journey through dementia, through the end of life. In March we will have been serving our community as well as many others for 24 years. Our beds are typically filled, and we have a significant waiting list, with no marketing, many of our resident's primary payor source is Medicaid.

I am writing to ask you to prioritize Assistive Community Care Services (ACCS) and Enhanced Residential Care (ERC) in the state budget for FY 2026. When we opened Our House, we intended to care for all who need us regardless of the ability to pay privately, therefore these payments are very important to continue operations in order to best serve our residents and in order for us to sleep at night.

A 2023 rate study by the Agency of Human Services showed large underpayment for both home and community based long term care services. Some rates were increased based on the study, others were not. Meanwhile the costs of services continue to rise. The result is that we will need to make difficult decisions in the upcoming year.

Presently we are not taking any Medicaid applicants from our waiting list, COVID alone had a huge impact on our annual budget. Minimum wage requirements, staffing shortages, state regulations past, present and upcoming, costs associated with floods resulting in significant building repairs out of pocket, rising insurance premiums, food, and fuel costs just to mention the obvious have been a significant burden and Medicaid reimbursement rates have always fallen short of what it actually costs to care for our residents.

Please prioritize Vermonter's access to crucial long-term care services. I am requesting that the Legislature fully implement the increases in the 2023 Agency of Human Services rate study and offer a 4% inflationary increase across home and community based long term care.

Thank you for your taking the time to read and understand the importance of my comments, especially for the well-deserved elder population.

Sincerely,

Paula Patorti