

Testimony of Representative Doug Bishop

Colchester's CHI-20 District

On behalf of all Representatives from Colchester, Town of Essex, City of Essex Junction, Milton, Winooski, South Burlington, Shelburne, Williston, Richmond & Hinesburg

Today, with the permission of 27 additional Representatives, and on behalf of the 10 communities and over 100,000 Vermonters we represent, we ask that you reject the Department of Mental Health's request to eliminate the \$160,000 it provides in support of the Community Outreach Program.

Town and city leaders across the 10 communities served by the Community Outreach Program have shared one simple message . . . this program is an invaluable tool, and it works!

As described by municipal leaders from Essex and Essex Junction, "Howard Community Outreach workers support public safety response to community members needing staff trained in navigating the health, mental health, and human services network and services. They are the co-responders that public safety depends on to assist when people are in crisis."

Of the Outreach team, the City of Winooski says they, "are a critical low-barrier resource for our most vulnerable community members."

Despite what DMH might say, our communities are clear, the Mobile Crisis program stood up by the State is not a substitute for the Community Outreach Program. At best, it can serve as a complement to Community Outreach but understaffing and delays in responding diminish the effectiveness of Mobile Crisis.

The towns are doing their part, providing 46% of the funding needed for the Community Outreach Program, but it is the State of Vermont that is primarily responsible for health and human services, and the Department of Mental Health must remain a financial partner with the towns in funding this program.

On behalf of ALL 28 House members from the 10 impacted communities, we support the recommendation set forth in House Health Care's budget memo and ask that you DO NOT cut the \$160,000 from the Community Outreach Program as the Department of Mental Health has requested.