



Washington County Mental Health Services
885 South Barre Road
Barre, VT 05641

**Vermont Joint Fiscal Committee
Budget Testimony
February 12, 2026**

Re: Medicaid Rate Increase and Protection of Community Mental Health Services

Good afternoon. My name is Beth Sightler. I am the CEO of Washington County Mental Health Services.

Washington County Mental Health Services employs approximately 700 staff and serves more than 4,000 Vermonters each year. We provide mental health, substance use, and developmental services that help people remain safe, stable, and connected to their communities.

I am here today to ask you to support a 3.5 percent Medicaid rate increase for designated and specialized service agencies. This increase represents a **total statewide investment of approximately \$5.8 million.** It is necessary to sustain the mental health, substance use, and developmental disability services that Vermonters rely on every day.

Given everything happening in the world right now, I consider it an honor to do this work. We support people at some of the most vulnerable moments in their lives. People who are in crisis. People who are trying to remain housed. People who are working to stay well, care for their families, and remain connected to their communities.

Our staff show up every day to provide that support. They prevent crises. They reduce hospitalizations. They help people remain in their homes and communities. This work strengthens lives, families, and the stability of our state.

This system exists because Vermont chose to build it. And it works.

But it cannot sustain itself without funding that keeps pace with reality.

The FY27 budget does not include an inflationary increase for community providers. At the same time, the cost of delivering care continues to rise. More than 80 percent of our budget supports staffing. Our ability to recruit and retain the skilled professionals this work requires

depends on stable, predictable funding. Without it, positions remain vacant, staff leave for more stable opportunities, and access to care narrows.

Over the past year, we have already made difficult decisions to absorb rising costs. We significantly changed our health insurance plan and increased employee premium contributions in order to sustain coverage. At the same time, we were only able to provide a 1 percent wage increase to our staff. These are dedicated professionals doing demanding work. Sustaining this workforce requires funding that keeps pace with the real cost of care.

An inflationary increase is not an expansion of services. It is what allows existing services to continue. It allows us to sustain the workforce that Vermont depends on to deliver this care. The State has also proposed reductions to prevention services such as Elder Care and Reach Up. These programs help people remain stable before crises occur. They reduce suffering and reduce costs. Removing them creates greater strain across the system. I respectfully ask that these services remain in the budget.

I appreciate the Legislature's past investments in community services. Those investments made it possible to build a system that reflects Vermont's values. But sustaining that system requires funding that keeps pace with the real cost of care.

The requested 3.5 percent increase, representing \$5.8 million statewide, is a necessary investment to maintain the stability of this system and the workforce that sustains it.

We will continue to do our part. Our staff show up every day with skill, compassion, and commitment. I ask you to do yours by supporting this increase and sustaining the system Vermont has built.

This work reflects Vermont's values. Sustaining it requires funding that does too.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Beth Sightler".

Beth Sightler, CEO
Washington County Mental Health Services
Barre, Vermont
elizabeth.sightler@wcmhs.org