



PEOPLE'S HEALTH & WELLNESS CLINIC

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Testimony by Daniel Barlow, Executive Director of the People's Health & Wellness Clinic in Barre City and the chair of Vermont's Free and Referral Clinic network.

Dear Chairs and Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees,

VFRC is respectfully requesting an increase in the maximum allowable value of the state grant by \$925,000, including \$462,500 in additional state general funds, which will be matched 50/50 with federal Medicaid administrative funding.

These funds will stabilize operations, allow clinics to bring key positions to full-time status, modernize infrastructure, and expand direct patient access.

Vermont's Free & Referral Clinics (VFRC) serve as a statewide network of community-based safety-net providers offering free medical, dental, behavioral health, and wrap-around services.

Collectively, VFRC clinics serve more than 9,000 Vermonters annually, including over 3,000 uninsured individuals. Our patients include working adults without employer coverage, older adults on fixed incomes, immigrants and refugees, people experiencing housing insecurity, and others who fall outside traditional healthcare coverage. Many would otherwise delay care or forgo treatment entirely. For these individuals, VFRC clinics are often the last door

open, providing preventive, primary, and urgent care that improves health outcomes and reduces avoidable hospital visits.

It is important to note that VFRC clinics are prohibited under federal law from billing any public or private insurance plan, including Medicaid.

When we see a Medicaid patient, we are unable to bill for that visit. Unlike nearly all other healthcare providers in Vermont, we generate no reimbursement revenue from patient visits. Our budgets are therefore entirely dependent on community fundraising and this legislative appropriation, making state support essential to maintaining and expanding care.

The majority of VFRC medical and dental providers are volunteers, including physicians, nurses, dentists, hygienists, and behavioral health professionals. These volunteers are supported by small part-time administrative and clinical staff teams who coordinate clinics, manage compliance, maintain electronic health records, and ensure continuity of care.

The reliance on volunteers allows VFRC clinics to deliver high-quality, cost-effective services. However, staffing limitations remain the primary constraint on patient access. By increasing funding for key positions, clinics can expand the number of sessions offered, enhance continuity of care, and provide timely access for more Vermonters.

At the People's Health & Wellness Clinic (PHWC) in Central Vermont, demand has grown steadily. In 2025, PHWC served 668 unduplicated patients, including both medical and dental visits.

Currently, the clinic operates three days per week, constrained by staffing capacity. With this requested funding, PHWC could expand to five or six clinic days per week, providing additional opportunities for preventive care, chronic disease management, and urgent care services.

The investment would also allow part-time positions to transition to full-time, improving recruitment, retention, and the quality of patient care.

Free clinics save lives. They often serve as the only option for patients who have nowhere else to go.

Timely access at VFRC clinics prevents minor conditions from escalating into emergencies, provides essential chronic disease management, and connects patients to social services and community supports. Clinics also provide significant public health value by reducing health disparities, improving access to preventive care, and connecting patients to resources that support long-term health.

By investing in VFRC, the state ensures that Vermonters who are uninsured, underinsured, or facing social barriers continue to receive high-quality care.

In summary, this funding request represents a high-leverage investment. It maximizes state dollars by combining volunteer labor, small staff teams, and federal Medicaid administrative match funding. It allows clinics to expand capacity, stabilize operations, and serve more patients in need.

Most importantly, it ensures that free clinics remain a life-saving safety net for Vermonters who would otherwise fall through the cracks.

Thank you for your consideration and for your support of Vermont's most vulnerable residents.

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