

Dear Appropriations Committee Members,

My husband and I are members of the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative (DDHI). Our son, Jack, is soon to be 25 years old and has lifelong significant disabilities. He is profoundly deaf (w/a cochlear implant), cognitively and visually impaired, developmentally delayed, and on the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). He is also completely non-verbal which makes him especially vulnerable. On an everyday basis our son needs help with ALL activities of daily living (ADLs), inclusive of diapering, communication, meal preparation, transportation, and medication administration.

When Jack's school days were over in June, 2023, he needed to greatly adjust to a vastly different world where a reduction in activities, daily contact with friends/peers, far fewer community outings, all became his new norm. While our designated agency (The Howard Center) has done its best, severe staff shortages have hampered its ability to come even CLOSE to what Jack was receiving for services while he was a student in VT's public school system.

Further, and most concerning, as my husband and I are aging we are constantly thinking about what a new living situation/home will look like for him when we are no longer able to provide the 24/7 care he is currently receiving from us.

We are very aware of the lack of Shared Living Providers (SLPs) available in our state right now -- and the long, anguishing "wait times". And even if there was an SLP "match" for Jack, we worry that his significant higher needs might very realistically mean Jack would cycle through many. That would be very destabilizing for him. Our son needs a housing option that would ideally include a STAFF of skilled and dedicated support people sharing in his care. There is a much higher likelihood people would not burn out with this type of housing model, and - most importantly, Jack would not experience the prospect of being shuffled from house-to-house for the rest of his life.

It is time for Vermont to rectify this. We need options beyond Shared Living for this vulnerable group of Vermonters with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and high support needs.

Families like mine are otherwise left in **impossible positions** - even considering the need to move from our life-long home state!

I would ask that you also consider it would be more cost-effective as well, because when the appropriate service-supported housing IS made available, more costly interventions, hospitalizations, emergency placements, etc. are avoided.

As a member of the DDHI, my husband and I support their following ASKS this legislative session:

1. **New permanent position at DAIL** – Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living – to support housing development and housing process for participants in HCBS services (DS,CFC,BI). Position is included in S. 328 Senate Housing Committee bill, and recommended by the Act 69 Road Home Report;

2. **New funding for Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to develop I/DD service supported housing** – there is no money in the Governor’s recommended budget specifically for I/DD housing. **The Senate Housing Bill includes \$3 Million** – the Road Home Report recommends \$5-10 million per year for 5 years;
3. **New funding for Bridge Rental Assistance** – State funded rental assistance (Section 8 vouchers)for participants in DAIL’s HCBS programs- The Road Home report recommends \$1-2 million dollars per year.The Bridge Rental Assistance Program that would include DAIL/HCBS is in bill H. 494.
4. If #3 is not funded, there is an **immediate need for 25-30 state funded rental assistance vouchers to support the tenants in the Service Supported housing** the legislature has invested in – e.g. the DDHI pilot projects in Waterbury and Burlington, and new I/DD projects in the VHCB pipeline-WWJ. \$400,000.00 dollars estimated annual investment.

With sincere thanks,

Donna & Patrick Savage (for our son, Jack D. Savage)

Williston, VT