



House & Senate Appropriations- Budget Public Hearing

Jessica Barquist, Vice President of Public Affairs

February 19th, 2026

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England proudly serves over 14,000 Vermonters across six health centers—in Burlington, Williston, Barre, White River Junction, Rutland, and Brattleboro—as well as statewide through our telehealth program. Every day, people turn to us for compassionate, high-quality, and affordable reproductive and sexual health care, including wellness exams, birth control, STI testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care, gender-affirming care, menopause and perimenopause support, and essential primary care services. No one is turned away based on their ability to pay. In fact, 56% of our patients have low incomes, and last year alone, we provided \$1.24 million in free and discounted care to Vermont communities.

Access to family planning services strengthens our communities. These services empower individuals, support families, and create a healthier, more economically stable Vermont. We recognize the challenges facing our health care system, and we believe that working together as providers, policymakers, and community members will help us build stronger, more equitable care for all.

Last year, this committee committed to raising the Medicaid reimbursement rates for the Family Planning service codes. This was done by using a modest state investment of \$85,000 to utilize the enhanced federal match rate of 90/10 for family planning services. This means that the federal government would be covering 90% of the increased rate.

Unfortunately, due to how 90/10 matches are calculated, DVHA has been unable to implement these rate increases and have requested this line item be removed from the FY27 budget. We are committed to working with DVHA to overcome their implementation hurdles and are requesting that this line item be preserved with language requiring us and DVHA to report back to this body before next budget cycle on our implementation plan and updated budget information.

While this initiative would provide critical support to PPNNE, it's important to recognize that it would uplift the work of all health care providers across Vermont who are dedicated to delivering these essential services. From OBGYNs to free clinics, these providers are on the frontlines, ensuring that low-income Vermonters receive the care they need and deserve.

In addition to everything I just mentioned, another way that PPNNE supports Vermont communities each and every day is through helping our patients navigate resources outside of family planning. Each PPNNE health center in Vermont employs Patient Support Counselors. This service is increasingly relied on as we see the impacts of HR 1 on Medicaid and SNAP benefits specifically. As part of the benefit assistor coalition, we are requesting that this committee support that coalition ask of \$5M to help Vermonters apply for and stay on their critical benefit services.

Our Patient Support Counselors provide short-term counseling and resource navigation focused on helping folks get connected to resources outside of Planned Parenthood to increase overall wellness. This can look different for everyone. For some folks this means we're connecting them to ongoing mental health providers like ongoing therapy or psychiatry; some folks might be looking for primary care or other community resources such as insurance enrollment or connecting to food and housing resources. Our goal is to get a sense of what challenges they are facing, what resources are available to support them, and how do we get folks what they need with as few barriers as possible.

The benefits of this program are not as easily captured in numbers but is evident in patient experience:

"By no exaggeration, the services provided through Patient Support Counseling is life-saving work. I have shared the resources I was made aware of through this service with friends, and the instant relief is visible. Not only does this kind of support help individuals, it aids in building stronger communities and mutual aid. Thank you."

Thank you for your time and consideration this evening. Together, we can strengthen access to care, support the providers who show up every day for our communities, and ensure that Vermont remains a leader in reproductive health.

