



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: Senate Committee on Appropriations and House Committee on Appropriations

FROM: Kirsten Murphy, Executive Director
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DATE: February 19, 2026

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council (hereafter “VTDDC”) is a statewide board created by the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights (hereafter “the DD Act”), first adopted by Congress in 1970. Our constituents are Vermonters who have an important stake in the cost, quality, and availability of both traditional healthcare and disability-specific Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). An estimated 86,000 Vermonters experience a developmental disability as defined by the DD Act, with approximately 3,400 receiving HCBS through the Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) Program.

The VTDDC is concerned about state spending that impacts the ability for Vermonters with disabilities to live and thrive in Vermont. Although the Council is housed in the Agency of Human Services, we have a memorandum of understanding with AHS guaranteeing our independence. We are free, therefore, to advocate on behalf of Vermonters with disabilities and their family members, regardless of what is in the Governor’s proposed budget.

Report under Act 69, Section 5

In mid-November, a committee created by the legislature under Act 69, Section 5 released a report, *The Road Home*¹, which lays out a 13-point Plan for Creating Permanent, Affordable, and Service-Supported Housing for Vermonters Who Participate in Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS).

¹ See: https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/The-Road-Home_Act-69-FINAL.pdf

As *The Road Home* details, the DDS system is overly dependent upon individuals living either with family caregivers (39%) or in an adult foster care arrangement called “shared living” (also 39%). These arrangements can be excellent options for people receiving DDS, but they are not appropriate for everyone. Moreover, Vermont has outstripped its capacity to recruit shared living providers, and it has pushed the limits of what aging family members can reasonably provide.

Federal Medicaid rules require that people receiving HCBS have a choice in where they receive these supports. While other states have added to their stock of varied residential settings over the years, Vermont did not. We now face a shortage of housing for DDS participants, including apartments with onsite support in larger affordable housing complexes and small group living opportunities.

Legislation this session will make progress toward the recommendations in *The Road Home*, provided lawmakers make resources available. Please support:

1. **Rental Assistance for Individuals receiving HCBS for an Intellectual or Developmental Disability:** A minimum of 30 state-funded vouchers are needed for projects already in development for DDS participants. *The Road Home* estimates that over time, \$1 to \$2 million/year will be needed for state-funded rental assistance for DDS participants.
2. **Capital to Develop Service Supported Housing:** S. 328 would make \$3 million available to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board for this purpose in FY'27.
3. **A Housing Specialist at the Department for Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living:** S. 328 would create this permanent position.
4. **An Advisory Committee to oversee the timely development of affordable service-supported housing for DDS participants:** Additional planning and leadership are needed to address the housing need of this population. S. 328 would create this committee at little to no cost.

Conclusion

Please invest the people’s money in the people who need it the most.