

Reach Up Testimony, February 12, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Meaghan Malboeuf, and I'm a Licensed Clinical Social worker at Northwestern Counseling & Support Services. I'm here today to ask you to ensure that the \$1.5 million in Reach Up funding, for Designated Agencies, cut from the Governor's proposed budget is reinstated and protected.

NCSS has a long-standing, successful partnership with Reach Up. We currently employ a full-time mental health clinician dedicated to Reach Up clients, and we've recently added a Reach Up Wellness Coach. In fiscal year 2025 alone, 63 people were served by our Reach Up clinician.

This collaboration exists for a simple reason: mental health and substance use are the leading barriers to employment. The Reach Up clinician role was created to meet people where they are - providing screening, assessment, coordination, and treatment planning that directly supports their success in the program.

The warm handoff between Reach Up case managers and our clinician helps us reach a vulnerable population that is unlikely to seek services on their own. These are adults facing serious socioeconomic barriers - limited income, transportation challenges, childcare issues - and without this model, many would fall through the cracks.

Let me share one example. A 38-year-old mother of three, with a history of significant trauma and frequent crises at home, simply couldn't maintain a traditional therapy schedule. Because of the Reach Up grant, our clinician had the flexibility to keep checking in, teaching coping skills, and staying engaged until this client could fully participate. Today, she's managing her trauma, parenting more effectively, and showing real compassion for herself while juggling enormous responsibilities.

This low-barrier program demonstrates preventative, community-based care. It keeps people out of crisis and out of emergency departments, and it helps them move toward stability and work.

I'll close where I started: please ensure the \$1.5 million in Reach Up funding is reinstated and maintained in the Governor's budget. This program works, and Vermonters can't afford to lose it. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.