



House Human Services Testimony 3/25/2025

Good afternoon Madame Chair and Committee Members,

I am Gloria Quinn, Executive Director of Upper Valley Services. Upper Valley Services (UVS) was founded in 1986 as a Designated Agency serving individuals with developmental disabilities in Orange County and in response to a strong and united group of families who advocated for this. Individuals with developmental disabilities and their families have always had a strong and guiding voice at UVS, and this continues today. Around this table sit parent advocates and board members who are equally concerned about the timing and impact of the current payment reform model. They represent many other families and advocates associated with Upper Valley Services who also have significant concerns.

These are unprecedented times, as we know. The chaotic environment and changes we are facing at the federal level leave many feeling confused and fearful. We don't yet know the outcome and the information we receive creates landmines around every corner. Likewise, the changes that Vermonters with developmental disabilities and their families are facing are also unprecedented and roll towards them at amazing speed, much like a tidal wave or tsunami, depending on the seat that one sits in and the additionally layered federal impacts to come.

The Conflict-of-Interest (COI) changes in Vermont are federally mandated, and we fully support them. We would like them to be implemented in a thoughtful, fully inclusive way that promotes partnership between provider agencies and the new Case Management Organizations. This kind of partnership would ensure that individuals and their families would receive fluid and consistent support, and continuation of services in the way that they need. We are hopeful it will be implemented successfully.

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We feel strongly as a Provider Community that the Payment Reform, which is not a federal mandate and is underway, is critically incomplete and problematic and should be pushed back to July 2026. This will give adequate time for careful adjustment and analysis by the State to ensure people are left unscathed. I can only give specific examples for Upper Valley Services, not for any other agency...I am here to testify on behalf of the over 200 individuals with developmental disabilities that are served through our agency. At UVS, we have spent an enormous amount of time analyzing and reanalyzing the potential impacts of the payment model as it has changed its form. At every step along the way we have participated in countless committee and statewide meetings to inform about impending impacts, always with recommendations to avoid damage and to ensure the model would be most effective in ensuring stability.

It is important to understand that the currently proposed payment model is based on a new standardized needs assessment, which assigns people to one of 6 tiers depending on the results of the assessment. But in practice, this system will not work as intended, particularly for those with the most complex needs.

At Upper Valley Services, we've analyzed the data carefully. Based on the currently proposed funding tiers, 65 of the people we support (32%) would be at significant risk of losing their shared living home and built-in support. These are not individuals with low support needs; they are some of the most vulnerable people we serve, many of whom have high medical and/or behavioral needs.

It is also important to note that UVS has followed the state's guidance for the past several years and passed along legislative increases to our staff and Shared Living Providers alike, to promote stability and retention. If the currently proposed model moves forward as is, many Shared Living Provider stipends would now be slashed. That's not only demoralizing, but it's also unsustainable. The great risk is that Providers will leave, and individuals will lose their home and the built-in support that sustains them. And there's no viable alternative. Vermont doesn't have housing. We don't have the staff. And Vermont can't afford to push people into higher-cost alternative placements that do not even exist.

The potential of these devastating changes is the tsunami in the lives of the 65 people I speak of. To lose one's home, support, neighborhood, connections and community can be very traumatizing, to say the least. The difference between these changes and a real tsunami is that this can be fully prevented. By pushing back the time frame of the payment reform model, it will allow for thoughtful and successful implementation of the new federally mandated Case Management system. Importantly, it also allows for more intensive analysis and adjustment of the payment model itself so that it works for everyone it is built to support. A new payment model should meet the needs of those it is set up to serve. Otherwise, I would ask what the goal and intent of the model is.

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I believe that leaders of DAIL intend to implement a model that works for everyone...certainly there is no intent to hurt anyone. However, the consultants that have designed this model have done so for many other States as well. At least a few of these States have struggled under this model...and some significantly so. For some states, wait lists, providers going out of business, and even lawsuits have resulted. This model has not been designed with Vermont specific needs, values, and current support models in mind....how could it with the resultant supports of so many people at risk?

We live in the context of one of the highest housing shortages nationally. Our staffing shortages match those across the nation. The lack of housing makes it nearly impossible for staff to come into this State to work. Many other States have safety nets that Vermont simply does NOT HAVE. In some cases, UVS becomes the safety net for other agencies through the 6 crisis homes that we operate and share with other Designated Agencies. They are at nearly full capacity at all times. There is no other safety net. From my vantage point, there is no other answer...this current design has the potential to hurt too many people. And these are just the people we know of.

Pushing back payment reform to July 2026 gives more time for the State to work with its consultants to reformulate a payment model that is Vermont specific and meets Vermont's needs to take care of its own. This will allow Vermonters with developmental disabilities to remain truly Vermont-strong.

Thank you,



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