

Testimony- FY26 Budget Public Hearing

02/13/25

Hello, my name is Delaina Norton, I am the Executive Director of Champlain Community Services (CCS) in Colchester, Vermont. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Champlain Community Services is a specialized service agency that supports Vermonters with developmental disabilities, autism, and older adults who wish to age in their communities rather than in nursing homes. Before my tenure as Executive Director, I spent many years working with two different designated agencies in Vermont and other service organizations serving vulnerable populations in New York State.

I am here today, to advocate for a 6.2% Medicaid rate increase for designated and specialized service agencies (the 6.2% is \$13,950,000 in general fund dollars). This increase is essential to sustaining vital services for vulnerable Vermonters.

Our System of Care provides critical treatment and support, and we are grateful for the rate increases over the past several years. These increases have helped with workforce recruitment and investments in technology and innovative support models. However, despite these efforts, our workforce remains stretched thin. In the past year, we experienced a 50% turnover rate among our service coordinators and have struggled to hire the necessary number of Direct Support Professionals since the pandemic. The primary challenge is wages. We operate in a highly competitive job market, and in Chittenden County, the cost of living and inflation drive potential employees to seek higher-paying jobs with fewer responsibilities.

Other financial pressures further strain our ability to attract and retain staff. Statewide insurance rate hikes mean that without increased Medicaid rates, employees could see a net reduction in pay, even after receiving annual wage adjustments. Rising operational costs combined with inflationary costs force us to make difficult choices. Medicaid rate increases have not kept pace with the Consumer Price Index, leading to a growing funding gap.

A 6.2% Medicaid rate increase is essential to ensuring that agencies like CCS can continue to provide the supports Vermonters with disabilities need to remain in their communities and avoid more expensive, higher levels of care.

Thank you for your time and for the difficult work you do. I appreciate your consideration and your ongoing support for our System of Care, which is critical to ensuring that vulnerable Vermonters continue to receive the services they need.

Respectfully submitted,  
*Delaina Norton*  
Delaina Norton

Executive Director, Champlain Community Services