

Letter in Support of Empty Arms Vermont Funding

To the House and Senate Appropriations Committees,

My name is Haley Peterson and I am one of your constituents located in Washington County. I am writing in support of a FY26 one-time budget request from Empty Arms Vermont (which would fall under VDH's Family & Child Health) that focuses on strengthening peer support for pregnancy and infant loss. My support for Empty Arms Vermont's \$40,000 one-time funding request is deeply personal.

My husband and I recently had the shock of a lifetime when we randomly conceived identical twins (3 in 1,000 odds). Shortly after we began to wrap our heads around becoming parents to twins, and leaning into both the madness and hopefully magic that it would entail, our twins were diagnosed with twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, or TTTS. TTTS is an in-utero condition marked by unequal blood flow across the shared placenta, which is nearly always fatal to both twins if untreated. We were transferred to the high risk Maternal Fetal Medicine team at UVMMC, and then to Yale for a highly technical surgery to attempt to sever the problematic connections across the placenta. While the surgery ultimately looked promising, we lost our first daughter a week after surgery, and then a few weeks after that, I went into extremely premature labor at 23 weeks. I delivered both of our girls at 24 weeks, and we couldn't buy our surviving twin enough time.

Being unable to save our daughters has been a pain unlike any I have ever known, but in the darkest times, Empty Arms has continually reminded us that we are not alone. Chelsea Levis met with me personally and put me in touch with another local Vermont mom who also lost twin daughters to TTTS. The ability to connect with others who truly get it, especially in a situation as rare as ours, and who not only understand the depths of our grief, but the reality that our daughters will always be a part of our family, has been life changing and has kept us afloat. Empty Arms knows the reality that 1 in 4 pregnancies end in a loss, that such losses come in all different shapes and sizes, and that our healthcare system caters predominantly to the delivery of a healthy baby--not all of the other outcomes in between. Empty Arms is a life vest to all Vermonters who are trying to make their way in the face of crushing loss and grief, and families that don't look the way they had imagined.

Thank you for your time and consideration of Empty Arms' funding request, and I also ask that you support this request in your committee discussions.

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