

FY26 Budget Testimony, Empty Arms Vermont
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To the House and Senate Appropriation Committees,

My name is Marie Frieze and I am the Development and Outreach Coordinator for the nonprofit, Empty Arms Vermont. We address the unrecognized need of individuals and families experiencing pregnancy and infant loss, which is a gap in Vermont's mental health care system.

I am writing in support of a modest, \$40,000, one-time funding request, which will strengthen and expand sustainability for Empty Arms Vermont and ensure consistency of programming for our participants.

In 2010, my first-born child, Magdalena (Maggie), died in the NICU when she was two days old. This devastating loss was compounded by a miscarriage during a subsequent pregnancy.

Blissfully ignorant to the statistics of infant and pregnancy loss in my first pregnancy, I entered my second, and subsequent, pregnancies wary and unhopeful. My parenting years began as gutted, anxious, and suddenly alone. While I had supportive family and friends, I did not have anybody to talk with who really understood the despair and helplessness I was feeling. This led to severe isolation during which time I spoke to few people and delayed my reentry into the workforce.

I discovered Empty Arms near the 12th anniversary of Maggie's death. The community that Empty Arms provides has filled a gap in my grief journey. As a support group facilitator and participant, I have also been able to provide comfort to others whose loss experiences are more recent and raw. I believe that, had an organization such as Empty Arms existed when I was going through my losses, I would have been able to better advocate for myself and, perhaps, experienced less anxiety during subsequent pregnancies. Knowing that I was not alone and with a resource to confide in, I would also have had the strength to continue my career in education sooner than I had otherwise.

Empty Arms Vermont brings awareness to the prevalence of pregnancy and infant loss and is fostering a culture change around how best to provide support to others during times of grief. This awareness has been useful for family and friends who feel at a loss as to how to support their loved ones. It also validates the experience countless folks have endured alone.

I ask that you support this \$40,000 funding request in your committee discussions. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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