

To the House and Senate Appropriations Committee,

Hello! My name is Nina Lesser-Goldsmith and I'm one of your constituents located in Chittenden County. I'm 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.

I support Empty Arms Vermont \$40,000 one-time funding request because I have suffered two perinatal losses and this funding is vital in our efforts to support families grieving after loss. In 2013 I was pregnant with my first child. At 20 weeks, while traveling in California, I went into early labor. My husband was back in Vermont. I delivered my baby in a small hospital; too early to be considered viable. After a number of consequential medical procedures I traveled home with an empty heart and belly. It was a devastating loss and the depression and grief that followed were the darkest of my life. I became pregnant again a year later, but I tragically suffered the same fate, again at 20 weeks. This time I was home with my husband and my doctor team, but the pain was no less and I was left desperate and heartbroken. At the time, there were no support services, networks or formal organizations in Vermont to lean on. I had the support of a therapist, but I longed to connect with peers who knew the depth of my pain. I was able to carry my two beautiful, living children to term after my doctors determined that I suffer from a rare condition called insufficient cervix (a condition where the cervix opens painlessly and prematurely). Those pregnancies were riddled with worry and stress as I navigated high risk pregnancy balanced with the trauma of previous loss. Empty Arms Vermont supports families through these unspeakable, unfair, and unfortunately; all too common occurrences. Peer support is a vital service that supports short and long term mental health among families suffering perinatal and infant loss. As I have said, these services did not exist when I suffered my losses. Every family deserves to be seen, supported, and offered assistance under these horrible circumstances. I believe EAVT does that successfully.

I ask that you support this request in the FY26 Budget.

Thank you,
Nina Lesser-Goldsmith

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