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To the House and Senate Appropriation Committees,

Our names are Rizlaine Sabiani and Sean Milligan and we are one of your constituents located in Vergennes, VT. We are 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 on September of last year, while 20 weeks pregnant, our beautiful daughter Lou was diagnosed with the most severe case of neural tube defect called anencephaly. Anencephaly is fatal and inoperable. Due to this heartbreaking diagnosis, my husband and I were forced to make a decision no parents should ever have to make: to terminate a much-wanted pregnancy for medical reasons. Given the stage of my pregnancy, I was induced and gave birth to my beautiful daughter Lou on September 12, 2024 at the University of Vermont Medical Center.

What ensued next is something I wish no parents would ever have to experience. Grieving the loss of a child is not only physically and mentally painful, but it is also deeply isolating. Our families and friends, who have fortunately not experienced the loss of a child, were simply ill-equipped to support us. Through Empty Arms, a group we never thought we would be part of, we have been able to share our daughter's story with other parents who have endured the unimaginable. Thanks to Empty Arms, my husband and I have found comfort and support, surrounded by others who truly understand our grief.

I ask that you support this request as well in your committee discussions.

Sincerely,

Rizlaine Sabiani and Sean Milligan