

To the Members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees:

My name is Leslie Kanat and our family lives in Jericho, Vermont. I am one of over 175 parents involved with the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative who are advocating for permanent Service Supported Housing. Our son receives support through a Home and Community Based Services Medicaid waiver. He has Fragile X Syndrome, the leading known cause of inherited cognitive delay and the only medically known cause of autism. This is a lifelong disorder, and he requires full support for his daily living, including hygiene, medication, safety, and much more. His communication is poor and unreliable, though over time we have learned to interpret what he means. Thankfully, he is a sweet and caring individual who finds great joy in being with others. He is now 24 years old, and our household is organized entirely around his needs. Families like ours care for adult children with disabilities out of love, but love alone cannot sustain the weight of this responsibility. Burnout, declining health, lack of services, the eventual loss of caregivers, and our eventual passing, means that the stability we provide at home is fragile and unsustainable. He is never left alone.

As Vermonters, we must do better for our most vulnerable residents and for the families and caregivers who support them. Service Supported Housing is a compassionate and practical solution. It would provide safe homes where adults with disabilities can live with peers, preserve family autonomy, prevent caregiver burnout, and ensure lifelong, community-based care. Without Service Supported Housing, families like ours are stretched to the breaking point, and the cost to the state will be greater in emergency interventions, than in proactive sustainable solutions. Our son and others like him are left vulnerable, and families like ours continue to sacrifice our own autonomy to provide the basics of care and safety. We can and must do better. Service Supported Housing is the compassionate choice, and the sustainable choice, for individuals with disabilities, for their families, and for Vermont.

We need to have options for adults with intellectual disabilities. The Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative is a Vermont parent-run advocacy group. We support the development of stable, Service Supported Housing communities for our adult children who have intellectual and developmental disability diagnoses, who qualify for Medicaid Home and Community Based Service waivers, and have significant support needs. I ask that you support Act 69 The Road

Home Report. Act 69 aims to create over 600 units of Service Supported Housing. The plan has 14 points, and I ask you to act on the following four points:

1. New permanent position at DAIL – Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living – to support housing development and housing process for participants in Home and Community Based Services (DS, CFC, BI). Position is included in S. 328 Senate Housing Committee bill and recommended by the Act 69 Road Home Report.
2. New funding for Vermont Housing and Conservation Board to develop I/DD Service Supported Housing – there is no money in the Governor’s recommended budget specifically for I/DD housing. The Senate Housing Bill includes \$3 Million – the Road Home Report recommends \$5-10 million per year for 5 years.
3. New funding for Bridge Rental Assistance – State funded rental assistance (Section 8 vouchers)for participants in DAIL’s Home and Community Based Services programs – The Road Home report recommends \$1-2 million dollars per year. The Bridge Rental Assistance Program that would include DAIL/HCBS is in bill H. 494.
4. If #3 is not funded, there is an immediate need for 25-30 state funded rental assistance vouchers to support the tenants in the Service Supported Housing the legislature has invested in – e.g., the DDHI pilot projects in Waterbury and Burlington, and new I/DD projects in the VHCB pipeline- WWJ. \$400,000.00 dollars estimated annual investment.

Our son is unable to live on his own. His future health and safety can be achieved with the level of care he needs by providing him with Service Supported Housing. Thank you for considering including these requests in the Budget.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leslie Kanat". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Leslie Kanat, PhD