

Testimony to Senate of Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs

Good morning and thank you to the Committee and Chair for the opportunity to testify this morning.

My name is Katie Tormey and I live in Burlington. I am the mother of a 37-year-old young woman, Emily, who has Down Syndrome. I am also a member of the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative. Most of you have heard from us over the past 4 years, but for anyone new, we are a parent advocacy group, 175 families throughout the State, advocating for safe, permanently affordable, service-supported housing for our adult children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, many of whom have moderate to high support needs. I am here today to talk to you about the immediate need for housing for this vulnerable group of Vermonters.

Act 186 came out of 2022 Legislative Session, which among other things provided funding for three pilot planning grants that ultimately resulted in four unique new housing opportunities in Randolph, Waterbury, Burlington, and Ferrisburgh.

Last legislative session, an extension of the work undertaken through Act 186 resulted in the Passage of Act 69, Sec 5. The State Housing and Residential Services Planning Committee was charged in developing a plan for 600+ service-supported housing units for individuals with developmental disabilities. This committee was composed of representatives from the Legislature, Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, DAIL, Office of the State Treasurer, Dept of Housing and Community Development, Designated Agencies, Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, self-advocates and family members. The result of the combined expertise, energy and innovative ideas from this group resulted in the Plan "The Road Home".

The Road Home is a plan. The recommendations are actions that the Committee considers to be urgently needed to achieve the goal of this plan -- 600+ units of permanent, affordable, service-supported housing for people receiving Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS) -- within a five-year time frame.

We don't want to see this plan dissipate or fizzle out. Continuation of this work is necessary. S328 Sec 9 calls for the creation of the Service Supported Housing Advisory Council. The Advisory Council will be the next step towards the creation of these 600+ units of housing. The group will be charged with carrying out the Plan. This group will need to be held accountable by not only this committee but others in the Statehouse as well. We need to keep things moving forward!

S328 Sec 13 calls for the creation of a full-time "housing specialist" position within DAIL.

As a parent, I see the Advisory Council and the Housing Specialist as essential components of the vast and complicated world of service supported housing development.

In addition to being a parent to Emily who has a developmental disability, I also have 2 other daughters in their 30's. I have spent 40yrs working as a physical therapist. Before becoming involved with DDHI I knew **Nothing** about housing, let alone the service support housing that Emily needs. The world of developers, housing trusts, funding streams, licensure, etc... was totally intimidating. And this is how all parents of adult children with I/DD feel. It is so overwhelming, that it's hard to even know where to start. We families need someone or something that can help us navigate the housing development

system. It is our hope that the Housing Advisory Committee and the new position within DAIL can make sure that families receive the education and support that is needed to find their way towards housing for their adult son or daughter.

When I first began to think about housing for Emily, I did not think a Sec 8 voucher was something she would be able to utilize. I had the idea that a Sec 8 voucher would only be for someone who was independent enough to live alone. **Emily is fairly independent, but she was not at a point where she could live alone.** So years went by as I was looking for housing options without Emily being on the waiting list for Sec 8. Speaking with a parent within our Down Syndrome group, I learned that **there was a way** to make use of a Sec 8 housing voucher for someone who was unable to live alone. There exists a 2BR housing voucher, with one of the BR's being used by a "live-in aide". **No where in the system had anyone ever told us about the "live-in aide" possibility.** The live-in aide lives rent-free and pays 50% of the utilities. Within a year or 2 of being on the waiting list, Emily was awarded a 2BR Sec 8 housing voucher.

Next came the search for a 2BR apartment. Or do we look for a roommate first? Who helps us find the roommate? Who helps us find the apartment? All of this landed on our family. It took over 4 months to find an affordable apartment that accepted the Sec 8 housing voucher and was in a somewhat safe area of town. Then came the search for the roommate - we advertised on FPF, UVM, Howard Centers listserv, etc... Again, it took awhile, but we eventually found a young woman to be Emily's roommate.

My point with all this is that families need support, education, assistance in all areas of looking at permanent housing. Detailed

information about housing vouchers, various models of service supported housing, services available, smart technology to facilitate greater independence. And even something like who to reach out to when we see a development going up - unfortunately a group of families in Addison Co. learned that they were too late in getting a few set-aside units even when the developer had not broken ground yet!

I feel very lucky that we were able to get Emily set up in her apartment, but this situation is not forever. This only works because of lots of family oversight. And we parents one day will not be here to provide that oversight. That is why service supported housing is such an immediate need. I'll be 70 this year and Emily's dad is 75. We don't have 10 or 20yrs to wait; this housing needs to happen now.

You, the legislators, have shown support for our families with the passage of Act 186 in 2022, and Act 69 in 2025 . Supporting the creation of the Housing Advisory Committee and the Housing Specialist within DAIL will be yet another chance to keep the momentum going and move things forward. This is the help that my family and all families like mine need.

Thank you for your time,

Katie Tormey  
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