



Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

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TO: Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing,
and General Affairs

RE: Service Supported Housing Plan

FROM: Susan Aranoff, J.D., Senior Planner and Policy Analyst

DATE: February 21, 2025

My name is Susan Aranoff. I am the senior planner and policy analyst for the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council. It is a pleasure to see you here today. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council (hereafter “VTDDC”) is a statewide board created by the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights (hereafter “the DD Act”), first adopted by Congress in 1970. Our constituents are Vermonters who have an important stake in the cost, quality, and availability of both traditional healthcare and disability-specific long term services and supports. An estimated 86,000 Vermonters experience a developmental disability as defined by the DD Act, with approximately 5,100 receiving some type of community-based support through Medicaid.

VTDDC is charged under federal law with engaging at the state level in “advocacy, capacity building and systems change activities that... contribute to the coordinated, consumer-and-family-centered, consumer-and-family directed, comprehensive system that includes needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.”

The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council has members appointed by the Governor, who, like your Committee, come from all around the State. Amanda Bianchi, has a developmental disability and lives with her aging father in Swanton. Chair, Anastasia Douglass, Esq. lives with her husband David, a D.O.C. discharge planner in Barre town. They have 3 young children and have moved their family once to get their children the services they need.

The Council develops 5 year plans and legislative priorities and platforms.

The Council is laser-focused on the need service supported housing for adults with disabilities.

Although the Council is housed in the Agency of Human Services, we have a memorandum of understanding with AHS guaranteeing our independence. I am free therefore to advocate on behalf of Vermonters with disabilities and their family members, regardless of any positions of the Governor or AHS.

Vermont Needs Service Supported Housing Now

When Vermont closed the Brandon Institution in 1993, then Governor Dean promised that the State would provide housing for Vermonters with disabilities in their communities. The State of Vermont has not kept this promise.

In Act 186 of 2022, the Legislature commissioned research regarding the need for service supported housing for adults with an intellectual or developmental disability in Vermont. According to the Act 186 Housing Report, the State of Vermont needs 602 additional units of service supported housing to meet the needs of adults with disabilities in Vermont today. The Housing Brief is attached to my testimony.

Act 186 of 2022 funded 3 Planning Grants to explore new housing models for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Two out of the 3 projects have been fully funded. The 3rd project, headed by Champlain Housing Trust, is on St. Paul Street in Burlington.

This unique model combines permanent affordable housing, individualized support services and community inclusion. Each of the 10 tenants will have their own apartment

with a lease and receive support from on-site staff. The model was designed with the input of adults with I/DD and their families.

The CHT project is affordable, sustainable, aligned with best practice, and adheres to state and federal regulations.

This project is 2.8M short of being fully funded; that is less than 25% of the total funding. The State has funded the PLANNING of this project, CHT has accessed significant funds from multiple other sources for IMPLEMENTATION of this project.

We thank you for your support of the \$2.8M which will bring this project over the finish line in the Budget Adjustment Bill.

WHY VERMONT MUST PROVIDE HOUSING OPTIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) funds services for adults with disabilities in Vermont called Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). To receive federal Medicaid funding for Home and Community Based Services, Vermont must obey CMS' Home and Community Based Services rules.

CMS adopted new HCBS rules in 2023.

The 2023 CMS Rule is called the Settings Rule. The Settings Rule governs the settings or locations where Medicaid-funded HCBS services can be provided.

The Settings Rule requires people with Medicaid-funded HCBS services be given choices about where they live. After a site visit to Vermont, CMS found that Vermont was not complying with the Settings Rule.

One negative finding was that Vermonters with disabilities were not being given choices about where they lived.

The Agency of Human Services' corrective action plan for its violations of the Settings Rule includes the Act 186 Planning Grants. Notwithstanding the fact that the service-supported housing pilot Planning Grants are part of the State's Corrective Action Plan, there has been no funding in the Governor's budget to build service-supported housing.

Vermont Needs 600 Units of Service Supported Housing for Adults with an Intellectual or Developmental Disability Now

In Act 186 of 2022, the Legislature commissioned research regarding the need for service supported housing in Vermont. According to the Act 186 Housing Report, the State of Vermont needs 602 additional units of service supported housing to meet the needs of adults with disabilities in Vermont today. The Housing Report is attached to my testimony.

Act 186 also funded three planning grants for pilot projects. However, we are not going to solve the supported housing shortage one project at a time. We need a PLAN.

Last year, Senator Ram-Hinsdale suggested we try to find a pipeline for service supported housing to avoid a project by project or unit by unit approach.

Language was added to the budget and to this year's budget adjustment act to make development of service supported housing a priority for the VHCB.

Thank you for these policy changes.

The changes in policy did not come with a plan or personnel and what we have found on the ground- is that in order to develop the 600 units of service supported housing, Vermont will need a PLAN.

Vermont is participating in an Accelerator Grant

The federal grant is bringing together the Agency of Human Services, the Medicaid office, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and others to focus on developing service supported housing.

Vermont Needs a Plan

The participants in the Accelerator Grant are a state level team that can be tasked with creating the plan for the 600 units of service supported housing Vermont needs.

Sidenote about the Closing of the Brandon Closing School:

People often say that when Vermont closed the Brandon Training School, we were the second State to do so. I've said that. We say it as if Vermont closed Brandon because it was good idea.

Vermont closed Brandon for the same reason it eventually shuttered Woodside- Vermont closed Brandon because of a lawsuit brought on behalf of the people who lived there.

That lawsuit began in 1980 and was filed by Vermont Legal Aid's Developmental Disability Law Project- headed by a 20- something year old lawyer named Sally Fox.

I am here today standing on the shoulders of giants.

I am asking you to keep the promises made by the legislature and Governor Dean in 1993 when Brandon was closed. The promises were made to the people who are here with me in the room today – and to their families. The promise to provide housing and the supportive services necessary for people with disabilities to simply live safely in their communities.

Conclusion

Please talk with the advocates of Green Mountain Self-Advocates and the families who are part of the Developmental Disabilities Housing Initiative - the parent -run volunteer organization of over 100 Vermont families who need affordable, permanent, service-supported housing for their family members.

In their stories, you will hear that hundreds of Vermont adults with disabilities need housing choices. Hundreds of adults are living with their parents when they would rather live independently or with their friends.

Many of the families that make up DDHI consist of aging parents- average age of 65- caring for their adult children, average age of 27. Their children have an intellectual or developmental disability and many of them have very significant support needs. These families urgently need housing options that address their needs and provide choice in permanent service supported housing that passes muster with CMS.