



Vermont Democratic Disability Caucus

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Vermont Senate Government Operations Committee

Vermont State House
Montpelier, Vermont 05633

Re: Letter of Support for H.861 — ADA Coordinator

Dear Members of the Senate Government Operations Committee,

The Vermont Democratic Disability Caucus (VDDC) of the Vermont Democratic Party (VDP) writes in strong support of H.861. The mission of our caucus is to create visibility and a strong voice for Vermont's Disability community in politics — providing an intersectional space for People with Disabilities to connect, create safety, and build political power. H.861 speaks directly to that mission, and we urge this Committee to advance it.

I'm writing as a disabled person and Chair of the Vermont Democratic Disability Caucus. I urge you to support H.861 and urge that the Senate Government Operations Committee move it forward this session. The House passed the bill nearly unanimously, and for good reason—it's time to act to provide an ADA Coordinator to ensure that Vermonters with disabilities are getting the services they need, deserve, and are entitled to by law.

Vermont is an aging state, and on top of that, approximately 150,000 Vermonters live with at least one disability, and around half of them have multiple disabilities. That is no small percentage of our community. Disabilities can make managing employment, accessible health care, accessing financial aid, accessing accessible housing, and many other necessities of life a daily struggle. In fact, 59 percent of those who struggle with mobility-related disabilities and 65 percent of those with multiple disabilities make less than \$25,000 per year. In my case, becoming officially disabled in the "prime" of my life, going from a large salaried job to a minimal fixed income via SSDI, and having over 50 surgeries and procedures basically since I turned 30: lack of accessible healthcare and financial aid has left me with debilitating PTSD and crippling debt.

While some departments in the state have dedicated disability specialists who excel at their jobs, other departments (and many employees and elected officials in cities and towns) rely on busy staffers who must make ADA compliance a small part of their overall duties. These individuals need help and are working in silos against other institutions. An ADA Coordinator under the guidelines of H.861 would provide oversight, increasing efficiency while simultaneously eliminating the duplication of work. Most importantly, it would increase ADA compliance across the state. H.861 would also open the opportunity for Federal grant funding that is not available at the present time due to Vermont's dysfunctional systems of ADA coordination through state and town governments.

I ask that you quickly move H.861 forward in the Senate. The ADA has been in force for nearly 30 years; it's past time we improved our efforts to guarantee Vermonters with disabilities the support and services they need. Vermont ranks 49th for voters with disabilities and 45th for overall healthcare system accessibility. Moreover, all Vermonters need more education and background in the experience of our neighbors with disabilities so that we may eliminate stigma around disability and be better allies.

The ADA Coordinator position would be an excellent step forward in that effort as well. Please, with your most important consideration, make it a priority.

Thank you for your service to all Vermonters.

Respectfully submitted,

Keilani Lime, Chair

Vermont Democratic Disability Caucus
Vermont Democratic Party

