

TO: Senate Health and Welfare Committee

RE: Comments on the 2026 Budget

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

DATE: April 11, 2025

REQUEST: 2.8 Million for 10 Units of Service Supported Housing in Burlington for Adults with Disabilities

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 VTDDC is concerned about state spending that impacts the ability for Vermonters with disabilities to live and thrive in Vermont. 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 what is in the Governor's budget proposal.

Fund the Construction of 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.

Act 186 of 2022 funded 3 Planning Grants to explore new housing models for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. One of the projects, 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 are now asking you for the \$2.8M which will bring this project over the finish line.

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.

The Pilot Grants were for planning dollars only. The State has not provided any direct

funding to build any actual housing for adults with disabilities in Vermont.

Please support the 2.8 million dollars in the House Passed budget to support the creation of new, scalable housing opportunities for adults with disabilities.

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 DDH 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.

Conclusion

Please invest the peoples' money in the people who need it the most. Please support the 2.8 million dollars in the House Passed Budget so that the Champlain Housing Trust's Act 186 service supported housing for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities can be built.

Thank you for listening and thank for your service