



TO: Senate Committee on Health and Welfare
FROM: Howard Center
DATE: April 10, 2025
RE: H.493 - Howard Center First Call and Community Outreach Programs

Howard Center respectfully asks the Senate Health and Welfare Committee to support funding for the First Call and Community Outreach programs. The Governor's proposed FY2026 budget significantly reduced funding for both programs. The House restored most of these cuts in their version of H.493.

Please support the funding for Howard Center's First Call for Chittenden County and Community Outreach programs in H.493 as passed by the House.

Howard Center has been a pioneer in crisis services, introducing Vermont's first Mobile Crisis Team in the early 1990s and launching the state's first Community Outreach Team over two decades ago.

Today, Howard Center crises services include low barrier services, 24/7 phone support and in person community response, embedded emergency department support, mental health urgent care, and crisis stabilization beds. Low-barrier services fill a critical need in the continuum engaging individuals in crisis with outreach, support, and relationship building necessary for engagement in additional services. If these services are cut or reduced, it will increase demand for mental health and substance use services in our communities.

Specifically, cuts proposed in the Governor's FY2026 budget include the elimination of:

- EPSDT/Administrative Medicaid funding which supports:
 - 19% of First Call for Chittenden County (FCCC) crises services workforce; and
 - A primary care embedded mental health clinician position; and
- Grant funding supporting the Community Outreach program, which provides critical low-barrier, community-based services across Chittenden County.

We urge your support for these vital community-based programs that are essential to meeting the diverse and growing needs of our communities. Please support First Call and Community Outreach in H.493 as passed by the House.