

Thank you for directing your Committee to work with the Senate Health and Welfare Committee to address the critical issue of medical transportation. As a small transit provider dedicated to the mission of providing access to health care and other essential needs for low-income Vermonters, I wanted to offer our perspective of this work.

For the record, I am Amanda Carlson, General Manager for a unique public transit service in Washington and Orange Counties, GOPHER, which is run by a non-profit corporation, Community Rides Vermont, with a mission of providing essential rides for vulnerable Vermonters in all-electric vehicles. Our service was initiated in 2023 through Capstone Community Action, Central Vermont's anti-poverty non-profit organization. This transportation service was developed in response to **Capstone's Community Needs Assessment that identified transportation as among the greatest unmet need, second only to housing, that vulnerable Vermonters face in their daily struggle to gain financial security and self-sufficiency.** In order to expand this project into a fully certified public transit provider Capstone established a separate non profit organization Community Rides Vermont. Thanks to legislative support, VTrans was able to provide critical funding for this pilot project in 2023 and 2024 in order to fully subsidize rides for Vermonters who do not have access to their own transportation and for whom Public Transit is not readily available. Although the promised funding for this year (SFY 2025) is no longer available, our company has pivoted to both remain open and continue providing medical rides with a shared fee model.

Our GOPHER service has provided over 5,000 rides in 2025, including 1,372 rides for medical services. Our service included partnership with Green Mountain Transit and with the Central Vermont Medical Center (CVMC). Financed through a grant with OneCare, this project focused on reducing hospital readmission through improved access to primary care via reliable transportation. Through our CVMC service, we provided 511 rides to primary care providers throughout our service area.

A unique attribute of our GOPHER transit is the specialized customer service we are able to provide our users who are often medically vulnerable. Our drivers can assist passengers directly to their appointment. If a person has an appt. at a large medical center, our driver can walk them inside to the clinic where their appt. is and pick them back there. This has happened many times, for example, a nurse at a public apartment building will call us to escort a patient to their appointment where they are going to be sedated and need an escort from the clinic back to the vehicle, and then back to the person's door. Our service goes above and beyond for individuals who might not have family or friends who might not usually assist in a manner like this.

Through our new subsidized service 'Gopher-It rideshare program' individuals are responsible for 25% of the cost of their trip, and grants and philanthropic donations cover the other 75% of the trip.

Some ways that people have utilized this program are:

To visit family members at nursing homes on a regular basis.

Accessing care at more distant hospitals, Dartmouth or UVMMC to receive specialized care. A case manager shared that one of their residents had previously paid \$600-\$700

out of pocket for a taxi ride to Dartmouth. With our service they only need to pay \$150 out of pocket for a ride with our new discounted ride program to receive this care. As depicted below, nearly a quarter of our works in 2025 was transporting vulnerable Vermonters to medical appointments. We are proud to have provided this critical service for those who lack access to their health care.

Thank you for your attention to this important work. I would be very happy to testify before the Committee to describe more of the services we provide and the benefits of these services.