



Supporting Vermonters to lead healthy and satisfying lives community by community

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE FOR JUNE 22, 2023



This week the Legislature met in a special session to override the Governor's veto of the budget and several other bills. The most critical component of the special session was successfully addressing the outcry about people who were losing their placements in hotels due to the end of federal funding. H.171, the adult protective services bill, was the vehicle used to address this crisis. We are pleased that it passed and is ready to be signed into law by the Governor and that the Governor's veto of the budget was overridden, cementing the 5% rate increase for designated and specialized service agencies.

PROGRESS and TESTIMONY

Legislative Action to Address Individuals Losing Pandemic Federally Funded Housing in Hotels

On June 20th the legislature met in a special session to address bills vetoed by the Governor, particularly, H.494 the appropriations bill. A coalition of progressive and democratic legislators had demanded action to address the people losing housing upon the end of the special hotel voucher program, which was funded with federal pandemic dollars that are no longer available. The Administration had already started moving people out of the hotels, many had nowhere to go and were sent off with tents and sleeping bags, even when they have challenges related to health and disability. Without the coalition's support there weren't sufficient votes to override the Governor's veto of the budget.

Legislative leaders met with the Administration and agreed to legislative language to improve the State's response. Although many in the coalition wanted greater investments and commitments, in the end, all agreed to support the proposal. The language was added to H.171, the Adult Protective Services bill. It achieves three prime goals:

1. Extends transition time to April 1, 2024, and improves support for people in the hotel voucher program.
2. Initiates formal legislative oversight during the transition process through the Joint Fiscal Committee.
3. Enables the Administration to have flexibility in the use of the funds to achieve the goals.

In her presentation to the House, Rep Wood highlighted that transition of individuals and families from hotels must be thoughtfully done through collaborative processes. The amendment sets a goal of reducing the negotiated payments rates to hotels by 50% and requires program participants to begin contributing 30% of their income for the rooms. The language covers all people residing in hotels as of June 30, 2023, but does not extend to people who become homeless later. However, if a person was terminated before May 31, they may apply to participate in the hotel program as a vulnerable individual. Everyone in the program is required to seek alternative housing, participate in coordinated entry and case management, and accept any housing alternative offered to them within 48 hours to remain in the program. The household may be forced to leave the program for misconduct.

The legislation also directs resources toward developing and repairing housing, The Housing and Conservation Board is directed to invest 30% of its \$40 million appropriation to rapidly expand housing resources for the unhoused including \$10 million for manufactured housing. An additional \$5 million is directed to the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP) and the State Housing Authority is to direct \$4 million for repairs to manufactured housing. FY 24 Budget already had \$10 million for General Assistance (GA) housing, services and support and to cover hotel costs.

In her remarks to the Senate, Senator Kitchel said there hadn't been sufficient information about the population residing in hotels, many of the households are vulnerable. The bill requires that everyone be offered alternative housing by April 1, 2023. The Administration must present a plan to work with families over time for the Joint Fiscal Committee to review. She believes there is sufficient funding in the budget between the flexibilities and carryforward funds from FY23. Senator Lyons added that the amendment addresses both housing and care.

Adult Protective Services Legislation Passes During the Special Session

During the special session H.171, the Adult Protective Services legislation, passed the full Legislature. VCP and other providers had concerns about extensive reporting requirements and the low standard for neglect which puts our workforce at risk in the original bill. An important amendment to the bill passed during the special session. It clarifies the definitions of abuse, neglect, and vulnerable adults and eliminates mandatory reporting of unintended errors. The amended bill, as passed, also has a less expansive definition of a vulnerable adult.

UPCOMING EVENTS


2023 Vermont Mad Pride Day March and Celebration July 15, 2023, 1 PM to 4 PM
BATTERY PARK, BURLINGTON, VERMONT

VERMONT MAD PRIDE is a march and celebration organized by psychiatric survivors, consumers, mad

people, and folks the world has labeled "mentally ill." MAD PRIDE is about shedding shame, challenging discrimination, advocating for rights, affirming mad identities, remembering and participating in mad history, and having fun. Our lives and contributions are valuable and need celebration!

ASL interpretation provided. Accommodations upon request to info@vermontmadpride.org.

To Register: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/2023-vermont-mad-pride-day-march-and-celebration-tickets-640066475057>






DATE: July 15, 2023
TIME: 1 PM - March
2-4 PM - Program
LOCATION: Battery Park
Burlington, VT

ROUTE: Assemble at Hood Plant parking lot on King Street, between S. Winooski Avenue and Church Street and march to Battery Park.

PROGRAM: Spoken word, music, speeches, and more; Food and commemorative T-shirts provided

SPEAKERS (TO DATE):

 Sera Davidow Director, Wildflower Alliance	 Bob Whitaker Author, Mad in America	 Wilda L White Founder, MadFreedom
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LEGISLATIVE RESOURCES

Vermont Care Partners Advocacy Fact Sheet

Here is a link to our updated [Advocacy Fact Sheet](#). The critical points are the rising demand, the impact of the ongoing workforce crisis and need for improved funding.

YouTube link for Mental Health Advocacy Day:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S3ml6skUE4A>

NAMI-VT Fact Sheet on Mental Health

Here is the [NAMI-VT fact sheet on mental health](#).

Vermont Care Partners Legislative Advocacy Webinar

In case you missed it, here's a link to the [recording](#) of our Legislative Advocacy Webinar to help guide you through the process of working with legislators. In just 40 minutes you can learn the basics for effective advocacy.

Key Committees in relation to Network Agencies

Here are the key Committees in relation to our network services with the Agencies in each legislator's region noted. We encourage everyone to reach out to your local legislators to introduce yourself and share the issues most important to you: [Legislative Committees by DA and SSA Region](#).

The purpose of the legislative update is to inform individuals who are interested in developmental, mental health and substance abuse services about legislative advocacy, policy development and activities that occur in the State Legislature. The Vermont Council is a non-profit trade association which works in partnership with Vermont Care Network to form Vermont Care Partners. Together our mission is to provide statewide leadership for an integrated, high-quality system of comprehensive services and supports. Our membership consists of 16 designated and specialized developmental and mental health service agencies.