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August 12, 2014

Joint Fiscal Committee
Rep. Martha Heath, Chair
Statehouse
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05602

Re: Proposed Rescissions

Dear Chairwoman Heath and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on proposed rescissions to Vermont's General Fund budget. Vermont Legal Aid represents low-income Vermonters in a wide variety of civil legal matters including assisting them with access to public benefits funded by Vermont's budget.

We recognize and appreciate the difficulty in crafting a responsible budget to meet the needs of all Vermonters. That difficulty is compounded when revenues do not meet expectations complicating execution of the programs and services you have already approved in a given budget year.

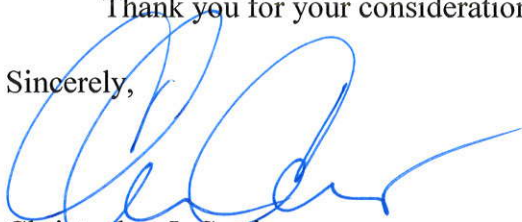
We were pleased to see the Administration preserved many of the anti-poverty measures put forth by advocates in the last biennium. And, we note that much of the rescission is based on "savings" or budgeted items that appear to be coming in under budget. That is generally a positive step. However, we are concerned about other reductions in the Agency of Human Services that represent reductions in programs and services - particularly in mental health and substance abuse services. Additionally, using Reach Up savings to fill the gap threatens policy changes approved by the legislature last year to address benefit cliffs and reduce recidivism (thereby generating still more savings) in our welfare programs.

We know the legislature will look carefully and critically at the rescission plan offered by

the Administration before making reductions that will impact Vermonters in need. We hope that where reductions are necessary as a last resort this year that you will consider restoring key investments – like addressing benefit cliffs - in next year's FY '16 budget.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'CJ Curtis', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Christopher J. Curtis
Staff Attorney