

Dear members of the Legislative Joint Fiscal Committee,

The Vermont Statewide Independent Living (SILC) would like to respectfully express its sincere and deep concern regarding the \$31.38M requested rescission for State FY 2015 through a combination of spending cuts, redirection of funding (such as savings) and other means. Such spending cuts would include direct service cuts to human service programs serving the State's most vulnerable populations.

The SILC understands the unfortunate recent outlook for an unanticipated revenue shortfall and certainly supports the need for fiscal responsibility. Its concern is two-fold: firstly, it thinks sufficient time must be granted to the public to understand the potential impact of these proposed cuts - particularly in the area of human services and, specifically, programs that support independent living (IL). Secondly, it is concerned that the long-term cost-effectiveness of IL programs/services will be overlooked as expedient short-term budget cuts are implemented.

For example, cuts proposed include a freeze on spending for the Vermont PDAC (participant-directed attendant service program), as well the Home Access Program (HAP) and Sue Williams (flexible) Freedom Fund (SWFF). Mental health services – in particular, the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment (CRT) program – and developmental disability services would also be affected. There are no better examples of cost-effective programs which assist Vermonters with disabilities live independently in their own homes in the community than those mentioned above. In the long run, lack of access to these programs will only result in greater necessary spending through institutionalizations, emergency room visits, crime control and Corrections services and other means.

My understanding is that the JFC has a maximum allotted time to deliberate of 21 days prior to a vote. With fiscal prudence as the ultimate and overriding goal - but with the rightful need for necessary and appropriate human services weighing heavily – the SILC would respectfully urge careful and due consideration of relevant public input and comment. In addition, the SILC urges deep consideration of the need to maintain reasonable spending for cost-effective human service support programs, programs directed to bettering the living environment of people with disabilities by encouraging self-sufficiency. Such a direction is, we feel, crucial to improving the lives of *all* Vermonters, indeed improving and enhancing Vermont society as a whole.

The Statewide Independent Living Council realizes the difficult task before you and thanks you for the opportunity to comment and for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted (on behalf of the full SILC),

Sam Liss, Chairperson