

VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

HELPING ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE IN A VISUAL WORLD SINCE 1926

TALKING POINTS

1. The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI) helps Vermonters with a vision problem to stay independent and remain in their community. National statistics for our type of services says that without them,
 - a. They are 15 times more likely than other seniors to end up in a nursing home.
 - b. They are 17 times more likely to fall and break a leg than other seniors.
 - c. That timely service is needed to prevent these things from happening.
2. We actually save the State money. Our services cost less than \$1000 a year per client. A nursing home costs \$70,000 a year. Many of our clients express their concerns that they will end up in a nursing home due to their vision loss. But by the end of our services, 98% of those who had those concerns say they no longer have that fear.
3. We serve 60% more clients yearly than we did 10 years ago. Our Staff is maxed out. I am actually requesting \$200,000 in additional funding. We currently subsidize the program by \$300,000 a year and can't increase that.
4. The proposed budget would cut our funding by \$42,000 (\$9000 is State funding, the balance is Federal matching funds). This would require us to lay off a rehabilitation teacher with the following effects:
 - a. We currently serve about 850 to 900 elderly clients a year. A staff reduction would mean a waiting list of 225 people.
 - b. This would be a 4 to 5 month waiting time due to the additional clients per teacher and that they would have to cover a larger territory and spend more time traveling on the road, making them less efficient.
 - c. This large a backlog would likely result in clients getting discouraged and leaving their homes due to their vision loss and not getting timely services.
5. We cannot fundraise the additional money to make up this decrease. There is a lot of competition for funding due to cuts made to many non-profits. We already fundraise as much as we can in trying to reduce the current \$300,000 subsidy.
6. Due to the Federal matching funds, every \$50,000 increase the State gives us would only really cost the State about \$11,000.

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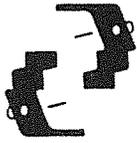
VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND
AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED
NEEDS STATEMENT

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired has served Vermonters since 1926. Our mission is to enable Vermonters with vision problems to achieve and maintain independence. Towards that end; we have provided skills training, adaptive equipment and materials, volunteer drivers, low vision evaluations, and have produced written materials in braille, audiotape and large print format.

Providing these supports to the visually impaired costs less than \$1000 per client annually. Compared to the cost of a nursing home, (which is 15 times more likely when a senior citizen becomes visually impaired) this program is very cost effective, and we actually save the State money by keeping them independent and in their homes. As our population ages, their need of our services has also increased. For those who are 75 and older, one in four will experience some form of vision impairment. For FY16 we are asking the State to help us in three key areas.

- Our first need is to increase the number of teachers that we employ and to reduce the amount we subsidize the programs. For the fiscal year just ended, we served about 1150 adults, an increase of 60% from 10 years ago. It has been 10 years since we have received an increase in funding. We currently subsidize adult services by \$300,000. The need is there; and the number of our senior citizens continues to increase, but we cannot further subsidize the program and our staff is maxed out for what they can handle.
- The second need is to increase funding for our volunteer ride coordinators. We receive funding for mileage reimbursement, but the time needed to organize and line up the volunteers with the clients' needs, etc. is not completely covered. We have gone from about 300 ride requests a year when we started in 1986 to over 2500 rides in FY14. The funding to cover these costs has not kept pace with the demand. Transportation for visually impaired people is very high on their list of needs. Being able to get to a doctor, getting the groceries or occasionally going out for a social event is important to them so that they do not feel isolated. As a ride of last resort, these rides help to keep them independent and active in their community.
- The third need is for technology training of the visually impaired. Adults with disabilities spend twice as much time online, on the average, as adults without disabilities; and these adults are much more likely to report that the Internet, smartphones, and iPads has significantly improved the quality of their lives. These facts are particularly true for the blind and visually impaired because of the nature of that disability. There are many apps in the marketplace that can help the visually impaired. We hope to provide Assistive Technology Services to help train clients on these devices. These assistive devices will include I Phone and Pads, screen print enlargers as well as speech and Braille input and output devices. Currently, there is no one available to provide this training.

We ask therefore, for the State to increase our appropriation by \$200,000 for the continuation and expansion of our services and the addition of technology assistance. This is still less than \$1000 per client per year. We will continue to subsidize our services, but need your help to reduce the amount that we subsidize. Please join us in keeping our clients independent and contributing members of our society.



VERMONT ASSOCIATION FOR THE BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED

HELPING ACHIEVE INDEPENDENCE IN A VISUAL WORLD SINCE 1926

Dear members of the Legislature,

The Vermont Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired (VABVI), has served Vermonters since 1926. We are the only non-profit in the State to offer rehabilitation services to the blind and visually impaired. Our mission is to enable Vermonters with vision problems to achieve and maintain their independence. Towards that end, we have provided independent living skills training, orientation and mobility, adaptive equipment and materials, volunteer drivers, low vision evaluations, and produced written materials in braille, audio tape and large print format. I have enclosed our latest fact sheet, and other information which tells you more about VABVI and the services we provide.

It has been 10 years since we have received an increase in funding, and since that time we have had a 60% increase in the number of clients that we serve. Our existing staff cannot handle many more clients. As baby boomers age, the number who will need our services will increase from the current 10,500 Vermonters to 18,000 or higher by 2030. Neighbors, parents, family and friends are among those who may be coping with a vision loss. We need additional funding to meet these needs (see attached needs statement), yet the FY16 proposed budget has us slated for a \$42,000 cut in funding.

There are several reasons why the proposed budget cut of \$42,000 for FY16 is so upsetting to VABVI and our clients. Approximately 20% of our clients express concerns when they first contact us that they fear they might have to move into a nursing home. For the number of elderly adults that we currently serve, that's about 170 people. For those clients whom VABVI has completed providing services, about 98% who expressed that concern are now confident that they can remain in their current living situation. We heavily subsidize the costs of this program, and actually need an increase to keep up with the demand. Unfortunately, we do not have the resources to increase our subsidy of this program.

VABVI provides these rehabilitation services to the visually impaired for less than \$1000 per client annually. Compared to the cost of a nursing home of \$70,000, (which is 15 times more likely when a senior citizen becomes visually impaired) this program is very cost effective. Just one client moving to a nursing home due to being on a waiting list would more than wipe out the savings the State is hoping for. Especially so, in that only \$9000 of the \$42,000 cut is from the State, the balance is matching Federal funds. Early diagnosis and adaptive training can make all the difference in allowing those affected to continue to live an active and independent lifestyle in their community.

A funding cut could cause our clients to be placed on a waiting list of about 225 people based on our current caseload; and this doesn't take into account that the number we

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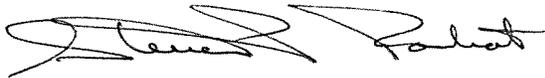
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serve rises each year. If we can't provide services to these people in a timely manner, many could end up in a nursing home; which runs counter to the Olmstead decision in trying to keep people in their community in the least restrictive environment possible. This cut will mean that we would have to let some of our professional staff go. Not only will this result in the above mentioned waiting list, but even if we get additional funding in a later year, I might not be able to find the staff once I've laid them off because nationally there is a 5,000 teacher shortage in this field.

On behalf of our clients, both current and future, I ask that the proposed cut of \$42,000 to our services be reinstated, and that we receive an additional \$200,000 to meet the existing needs. I sincerely believe that the State could end up paying significantly more than the \$42,000 if this funding, at a minimum, is not restored; as additional blind and visually impaired people will require assisted living or nursing home care.

Please join us in keeping our clients independent and contributing members of our society. I appreciate your consideration in this critical area of need.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Steven P. Pouliot". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "P".

Steven P. Pouliot
Executive Director