

MEMORANDUM

To: Molly Gray, Lieutenant Governor

Fr: Jahnessa Ryea

Re: Brave Little State

Date: March 26, 2021

Background:

VPR Interview, Brave Little State

Invitation from Matthew LeFleur

Regarding SSDI and SSI benefits in Vermont, how to increase employment without the risk of losing benefits, how to increase transparency in the benefit system, identify racial disparities in benefits.

Suggested Speaking Points:

- The Governor's Committee on the Employment of People with Disabilities (GCEPD) - exists so that advocate for equal employment opportunities
 - o Vermont ranks 6th on top 10 states for disability employment
- **SSI Benefits:** As of 2021, SSI pays up to \$846.04 to an eligible individual living independently in Vermont. If you are married and you and your spouse are both SSI eligible, the most SSI will pay is \$1,289.88
 - o Eligibility: age 65 and older, or
 - o age 0-65 and blind, or
 - o age 0-65 and disabled
 - o ** Must also be a US citizen or have an immigrant status that permits you to collect benefits** (VT law help.org)
- **SSDI Requirements:** you must have worked in a job or jobs covered by Social Security, and
- you must have a medical condition that is expected to last more than a year or lead to death. (VT law help.org)
- Benefits: \$1,200 a month — about \$15,000 per year. (Burlington free press)
- **In 2019**, the average annual Social Security income received by African American men 65 years and older was \$14,409 compared to \$12,806 for African American women.
- **In 2019**, the average annual Social Security income received by American Indian and Alaska Native men 65 years and older was \$14,393, and for women it was \$12,313.

Employment:

- **Ticket to Work Program:** supports disability recipients age 18-64 who want to work. It helps people progress to financial independence - improve learning potential

- Job boards listing jobs that are available to disabled people (Copeland Furniture in Bradford; the Vermont Country Store, which is based in Weston; Gardeners' Supply, headquartered in Burlington; and Vermont Soap in Middlebury, the Alchemist.) or (<https://www.disabledperson.com/jobs?location=vermont+&page=2&term=&utf8=%E2%9C%93>)
- "People with physical or mental disabilities who can perform the essential functions of their jobs (with or without reasonable accommodations) are protected from discrimination in employment. These legal protections apply to all aspects of employment including hiring, pay, job assignments, promotions, layoff, training, fringe benefits, firing, and any other term or condition of employment." (<https://workplacesforall.vermont.gov/about-us/types-workplace-discrimination-vermont/disability>)
- Campaign for Disability Employment: foster a workplace that is inclusive for everyone by reducing stigma around those with disabilities
<https://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org/about/supporters/>

Services for Families/Individuals with Disabilities:

- The Bridge Program: Care Coordination for Children with Developmental Disabilities
 - o Provides support to families of children and young adults under age 22 who have developmental disabilities to access and coordinate needed medical, educational, social or other services.
- Family Managed Respite (FMR)
 - o Provides family caregivers a break in ongoing care for children and young adults, under age 21, who have an identified mental health condition or developmental disability. Respite can be used as needed, either planned or in response to a crisis. It can also be used to create a break for the normal routine for the child with a disability.
- Benefits Counseling Program (VR)
 - o VR benefits counselors aid people in the transition of going back to work or adding a job while collecting SSI/SSDI

Transparency:

- SSA Open Government Initiative <https://www.ssa.gov/open/>

Attachments:

Benefits in Vermont:

<https://vtlawhelp.org/social-security-benefits>

<https://www.burlingtonfreepress.com/story/money/2015/10/08/vermonters-disability-rate/73458020/>

SSDI:

<https://www.ssa.gov/disability/> (SSDI)

<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/demographic.htm> (benefits by demographic)

<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/ss-customer/age-group-dib.pdf> (benefits by age group)

<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/factsheets/ss-customer/ssi-children.pdf> (child recipient)

SSI:

<https://www.ssa.gov/pubs/EN-05-11128.pdf> (SSI)

Employment:

<https://therespectabilityreport.org/2019/03/14/vermont-disability-employment-2019/> (where VT falls on employment of those with disabilities)

<https://yourtickettowork.ssa.gov/> (ticket to work program)

<https://www.disabledperson.com/jobs?location=vermont+&page=2&term=&utf8=%E2%9C%93>
(Website targeted towards jobs that hire people with disabilities)

<https://workplacesforall.vermont.gov/about-us/types-workplace-discrimination-vermont/disability>
(workplace for all)