

VERMONT LEGAL AID, INC.

OFFICE OF THE HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

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HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE FUNDING

Trinka Kerr, Chief Health Care Advocate

February 18, 2016

The Office of the Health Care Advocate:

- Provides individual consumer assistance to Vermonters with health insurance and health care issues through our free statewide hotline (1-800-917-7787) and our website (www.vtlawhelp.org/health)
- Advocates on behalf of all Vermonters on health care policy and consumer protection issues before the Green Mountain Care Board, other state agencies and the legislature.

HCA funding:

- We have eight funding sources coming to us through three state agencies, but our contract is with the Agency of Administration.
- Two of those funding sources are federal Affordable Care Act grants that expire this year, totaling \$160,716.
- The Governor has proposed cutting our budget by that amount.
- The Governor's recommend is \$1,297,406.
- Our funding level for SFY 2016 was \$1,458,122.
- **To maintain our current staffing level, we are requesting an increase of \$109,292, above the Governor's recommend**, for a total of \$1,406,698.
 - We don't need the full amount of the cut to be restored to maintain the status quo because Vermont Legal Aid cut its health care benefits this year and froze the salary scale.

The need for individual consumer assistance has remained high.

- Our expectation was that Vermont Health Connect would be functioning much better by this time. That has not yet happened. Almost half of our calls are related to Vermont Health Connect.
- Our call volume hit record highs in five of the last twelve months. We are on track for another record this month.

The Office of the Health Care Advocate, previously named the Office of Health Care Ombudsman, is a special project of Vermont Legal Aid.

- It has been very hard to predict call volume. We estimated a 25% increase in call volume from VHC, which was launched in October 2013. Instead, it went much higher and we do not expect it to decrease to pre-VHC levels.

Call Volume Increase (SFY 2012-SFY 2017)

	SFY 2012	SFY 2013	SFY 2014	SFY 2015	SFY 2016 (Est.)	SFY 2017 (Est.)
Case Volume	3,061	3,167	3,907	4,695	4126	3950
Percent increase from SFY 2012		3%	28%	53%	34%	29%

All Cases (2006 - 2016)											
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
January	313	280	309	240	218	329	282	289	428	470	410
February	209	172	232	255	228	246	233	283	304	388	290*
March	192	219	229	256	250	281	262	263	451	509	
April	192	190	235	213	222	249	252	253	354	378	
May	235	195	207	213	205	253	242	228	324	327	
June	236	254	245	276	250	286	223	240	344	303	
July	183	211	205	225	271	239	255	271	381	362	
August	216	250	152	173	234	276	263	224	342	346	
September	181	167	147	218	310	323	251	256	374	307	
October	225	229	237	216	300	254	341	327	335	311	
November	216	195	192	170	300	251	274	283	306	353	
December	185	198	214	161	289	222	227	340	583	369	
Total	2583	2560	2604	2616	3077	3209	3105	3257	4526	4423	700

*as of 2/16/16

In addition, the need for public policy and consumer protection advocacy has increased.

- The HCA participates and speaks for consumers in more forums, in more stakeholder work groups and boards than ever. We are the main public voice for patients and consumers in Vermont.
- As the health care payment and delivery system is radically transformed due to Accountable Care Organizations and potentially the proposed All-Payer Model, it is more important than ever that the HCA be in the room to speak up for consumers and advocate for protections.