

Dear Senators,

We are writing to encourage you to include in the state budget ongoing funding that would make the very successful Working Bridges Program available in every county in Vermont.

An allocation would be used for two purposes: 1) backbone functions that would support the expansion of Working Bridges programs in United Ways across the state, and 2) stipends provided to new Working Bridges employers during their first year.

Established over 15 years ago, Working Bridges is a partnership between United Way and local employers that connects employees to the local, state and federal resources they need to sustain stable employment.

A resource coordinator meets employees in their workplace to connect them with resources like housing, child care, and transportation, as well as access to small loans and financial literacy coaching.

There are currently two Vermont United Ways that offer Working Bridges programs (United Way of Northwest Vermont and Green Mountain United Way), for a total of 24 successfully operating employer sites. Several other, smaller rural United Ways are eager to launch programs in their local communities. *The first part of the funding we are requesting is \$100,000 for backbone functions to support Working Bridges across the state.*

Employers pay Working Bridges an annual fee-for-service. While employer fees cover the cost of a resource coordinator, they do not cover backbone expenses: data collection, licensing, marketing, and employer trainings.

United Ways must seek philanthropic funding, both to launch a program and to cover yearly backbone expenses. State funding for those core expenses would reduce barriers and allow additional United Ways to expand the program into their areas of the state while making existing programs financially sustainable. For a relatively small investment, the State of Vermont would increase access to local resources and workforce stability around the state, thus providing working families and the business community essential support.

The second part of the funding we are requesting from the state is \$90,000 to partially offset fees for first-year employment sites. New employers are sometimes hesitant to

join Working Bridges, yet once they have had a year of exposure, they understand the value of the program and are better positioned to pay the going rate for services.

State funding will be managed by the United Way of Northwest Vermont in support of the Working Bridges programs across all United Ways.

Working Bridges:

- prevents workers from unnecessarily dropping out of the workforce and promotes financial and life stability;
- supports businesses by improving retention, productivity and engagement
- strengthens our local economies by promoting both worker and workplace stability.

Attached, please find a summary of some of the key metrics of the Working Bridges program.

We hope you will consider this modest request that will bolster the economy statewide.

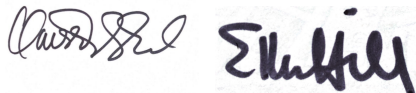
Sincerely,



Jesse Bridges
Chief Executive Officer
United Way of Northwest Vermont



Tawyna Kristen
Executive Director
Green Mountain United Way



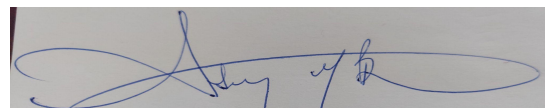
Clarissa French & Ellen Hill
Co-Executive Directors
United Way of Lamoille County



Helena Van Voorst
Executive Director
United Way of Addison County



Ruben Garza
Executive Director
United Way of Windham County



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