

# VERMONT LEGAL AID, INC.

## OFFICE OF THE HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

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## HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE FUNDING FOR SFY 2017

Senate Appropriations Committee

Trinka Kerr, Chief Health Care Advocate

April 5, 2016

The Office of the Health Care Advocate is a project within Vermont Legal Aid, which is a statewide non-profit law firm. As required by state statute, the HCA:

- 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](http://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. The HCA represents the public in health insurance rate review, certificate of need, and hospital budget proceedings, and has been advocating for consumer protections in the Governor's proposed All Payer Model.

### HCA funding:

- The appropriation for our funding is located in H.875 at Sec. E.100.3 (a), in the amount of \$1,457,406 for the state Agency of Administration contract with the HCA.
- Our current SFY 2016 funding comes from 8 sources funneled through three state agencies, but our contract is with the Agency of Administration.
- Two of those funding sources, totaling \$160,716, are federal Affordable Care Act grants that expire this year: a consumer assistance program grant, and a rate review grant.
- The Governor did not fill the gap from the loss of federal funding. His budget recommendation was \$1,297,406, a cut of \$160,716 from our SFY 2016 funding amount of \$1,458,122.
- The House figured out a way to fill the gap, and basically level funded the HCA.
- The House solution: In the Governor's budget, the Green Mountain Care Board allocated \$350,000 in Global Commitment dollars to the HCA. The House increased that amount to \$510,000 but took the money from billback (from the hospitals and insurers) rather than Global Commitment. Billback requires a state contribution. The difference in General Fund from moving the funding to billback and out of Global Commitment was a savings to the state of \$1,780.

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

- **VLA appreciates the support from the House and asks the Senate to approve the same appropriation level.** The HCA could not absorb a cut like the Governor's proposal without reducing services.

Ongoing need for services:

- Our expectation was that Vermont Health Connect would be functioning much better by now. Although we have seen tremendous improvement, too many Vermonters are still having problems with the exchange.
- Almost half of our calls are related to issues with VHC.
- It has been very hard to predict call volume. We estimated a 25% increase from VHC, which was launched in October 2013. Call volume increased more than that, 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.)
<b>Call Volume</b>	3,061	3,167	3,907	4,695	4126	3950
Percent increase from SFY 2012		<b>3%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>29%</b>

### Monthly Call Volume 2006-2016

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
<b>January</b>	313	280	309	240	218	329	282	289	428	470	410
<b>February</b>	209	172	232	255	228	246	233	283	304	388	511
<b>March</b>	192	219	229	256	250	281	262	263	451	509	416
<b>April</b>	192	190	235	213	222	249	252	253	354	378	-
<b>May</b>	235	195	207	213	205	253	242	228	324	327	-
<b>June</b>	236	254	245	276	250	286	223	240	344	303	-
<b>July</b>	183	211	205	225	271	239	255	271	381	362	-
<b>August</b>	216	250	152	173	234	276	263	224	342	346	-
<b>September</b>	181	167	147	218	310	323	251	256	374	307	-
<b>October</b>	225	229	237	216	300	254	341	<b>327*</b>	335	311	-
<b>November</b>	216	195	192	170	300	251	274	283	306	353	-
<b>December</b>	185	198	214	161	289	222	227	340	583	369	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>2583</b>	<b>2560</b>	<b>2604</b>	<b>2616</b>	<b>3077</b>	<b>3209</b>	<b>3105</b>	<b>3257</b>	<b>4526</b>	<b>4423</b>	<b>1337</b>

\*Launch of Vermont Health Connect.