

Testimony for Vermont Care Partners' Press Conference

On the Governor's Proposed FY2017 Budget

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I am Mark Utter and I am delighted to be here today and want to share my perspective as someone who receives services from one of the Vermont Care Partners.

I have been a dishwasher for Sodexo at Champlain College for 15 years but the truth is, I am an aspiring author and inspirational speaker. I have made a highly acclaimed movie about what it is like to be me. It's called "I am in here; a view of my daily life with good suggestions for improvement from my intelligent mind". I have copies here for all of you.

I receive services at Champlain Community Services because I have a body that often needs prompting because my brain doesn't connect with my motor skills very well.

I need services to assist me in the following ways:

I am not really safe out in the world on my own.

I need support to communicate my thoughts as I am not reliable as a verbal speaker and refining my rough motor skills by supporting my typing is necessary.

I am also aided at my job by a job coach.

Oh, it might all sound pretty basic to you but if I had all this stuff I could really get moving on my career which will eventually bring in a taxable income for me and I hope will also make some income for the people who support my communication.

The truth of the matter is this.

I am at an agency that is underfunded.

Because of this it pays its staff low wages.

Because of this it has a high turnover rate and there are often positions open. One of those positions has been someone to work with me.

I came to Champlain Community Services 5 months ago because of their innovative vocational program. Not only do they get folks with disabilities out into the work force but they assist people in developing their own businesses. My business is called “Utter Communication Strategies” and I’m champing at the bit to get it moving forward. I can’t without daily staff that are trained to support my communication.

Here are my thoughts about the governor’s proposed budget:

I am happy that there are no proposed cuts to our budget as we have taken a beating for the last ten years.

I am so happy there are 8 million dollars for new caseloads.

What we need is money for a cost of living increase for the people who work for us.

Having a ten percent increase, yes a 10 percent increase, would allow our staff to get a livable wage.

I think most everyone here is proud of the work we do in Vermont. The designated agencies and specialized service agencies are a part of this work. Please restore our funding so we can become even greater at what we do.

Thank you. I will be available for comments after the following remarks.