

February 12, 2016

Comments provided by NAMI Vermont  
Re: Reach Up Benefits Budget Cuts  
House Appropriations Committee

The National Alliance on Mental Illness of Vermont (NAMI Vermont), joins Disability Rights of Vermont, Vermont Center for Independent Living, and others, in protesting the cuts to Reach Up benefits for families with children, headed by a disabled adult. Those families receiving SSI payments still live in poverty, and in no way can support themselves, much less a child, without additional income or supports.

Reach Up helps families with children by providing case management, cash assistance for basic needs, and services that support work and self-sufficiency. This budget cut is counter-intuitive to the mission of Reach Up. These families are striving for self-sufficiency by being involved in this program.

**Our Mission:** NAMI Vermont supports, educates and advocates so that all communities, families, and individuals affected by mental illness can build better lives. Like people with physical disabilities, people with serious mental illnesses can and do lead productive and responsible lives, and want to achieve gainful employment. But the additional strain of even deeper poverty amounts to unnecessary additional stress on their recovery.

Declining enrollments in Reach Up prove its success in lifting people out of poverty. This success should not be compromised; the \$125 monthly cut for those families must be rescinded during the mid-year budget adjustment. Cost savings are essential to the state's budget, however the focus should be on improving cost efficiencies to the process of programs or other inefficient expenses, and not cutting benefits of vulnerable individuals who are trying to achieve self-sufficiency through these value-added programs.

Laurie Emerson, Executive Director  
NAMI Vermont