

June 23, 2017

The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
United States Senate  
437 Russell Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernard Sanders  
United States Senate  
332 Dirksen Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Peter Welch  
United States House of Representatives  
2303 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Leahy, Senator Sanders and Representative Welch,

Public discussions about Medicaid dollars tend to focus on their value in helping vulnerable Americans access necessary health care. However, Medicaid dollars pay for essential education supports and services, particularly in our highest poverty and most rural communities.

Medicaid is a critical component of our education system of care. Our schools no longer just teach “the 3Rs.” In communities across the state, in the face of rising child poverty and an opiate scourge, our schools are compelled by human decency and economic imperative to provide our youngest and most vulnerable citizens the basic safety and support and food they need to be resilient in the face of trauma, to grow up strong, and to develop the academic and social skills to become productive, economically-independent citizens in our communities. Medicaid dollars pay for the critical interventions our children need, particularly in our most disadvantaged and our most rural communities.

In Vermont, Medicaid provides significant direct financial resources (≈\$13M in FY16) to our school systems and our most vulnerable youth to support critical services that they could not otherwise afford. While this is small by national standards, these sums seem quite large in the context of some of our smallest and most rural districts. These dollars pay for social workers, early childhood education, and a host of programs that provide children with opportunities



they need to develop the social, emotional and self regulatory skills they need to function productively in school and society. The Medicaid dollars also fund after school and summer programs that both provide students with the academic enrichment they need to succeed in school and let parents go to work and put a roof over their families' heads, without worrying if their children are safe. In our most rural communities, our schools are sometimes the only remaining institution. As such, they are central locations where students can receive services in cost effective and efficient ways—and more effectively and efficiently than a market could provide. All of these programs are pro-social, preventive interventions that support the healthy development of our youth and maximize each child's opportunity to benefit from the educational investments made in their growth. Investing in these children is our best investment in a strong and vibrant future for our state.

We implore Congress to protect this valuable funding stream on behalf of the children in Vermont and across the nation who count on these funds and the important programming it provides.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RH', written in a cursive style.

Rebecca Holcombe, Ed.D., Secretary  
Vermont Agency of Education