



Council Connections brings the latest news on disability rights, resources that promote inclusion, and opportunities for advocacy to individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members living in the heart of Vermont Communities.

CALLS, EMAILS, AND LETTERS ARE NEEDED NOW!

In his proposed budget last January, **Governor Scott cut millions of dollars in services for people with Developmental Disabilities.** The Legislature has now passed a budget that restores this funding for services for people with Developmental Disabilities. The Governor is going to veto the budget – for reasons not related to developmental services -- and next week the Legislature will vote on a new budget. Anything can happen in this special session on the budget!

Please contact your Senators and Representatives this weekend: **THANK them for supporting services** for people with disabilities and **ASK them** for their continued support. Don't know who or how? [Find your legislator](#) by name or town.

Please contact Sue at the Council office:

Susan.Aranoff@Vermont.gov, (802) 828-1311

for questions or assistance contacting your Senators and Representatives.



MARIJUANA MAY NOT BE ENTIRELY LEGAL AFTER ALL (FOR POOR PEOPLE, ANYWAY)

Vermonters who plan to have, grow, or use weed can still risk losing their homes and services if they receive public benefits. Marijuana is still illegal under federal law.

In January 2018 [Governor Phil Scott signed act H.511](#) so that people who possess and use marijuana in small amounts will no longer face penalties starting July 1, 2018.

Unfortunately, this is not the case for people who have low (or no) income. The [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development](#) has made it clear that all public housing authorities will lose federal funding if they overlook occupants who use any form of the plant. Local housing administrators

Public tenants may not smoke, vape, eat, or apply oils, balms, and salves, or use in any way a part of the

marijuana plant.

Photo credit to [Thought Catalog](#) on [Unsplash](#).

may decide the outcome for their tenants on a "case by case" basis, which leaves some asking, "If it's not against Vermont law, will the federal law be enforced?"

There are mixed-messages about enforcement and penalties, but using marijuana is still illegal.

The [Americans with Disabilities Act](#) gives [some reasonable accommodations to renters](#), but it does not make exceptions for federally illegal drug use, even if you have a prescription from your doctor.

You may be evicted from your home if you use marijuana on site. This includes:

- Section 8 housing
- public housing sites such as Templewood Court, Champlain Apartments, Green Acres, etc.
- nursing homes.
- college campuses
- anywhere that receives federal funding as part of its yearly budget.



Still unsure? You can select your county, browse the sites in the area, and [see if your home is listed](#). Still-still unsure? [Email the housing authority](#) in your county.

Marijuana is used medicinally by some with chronic pain, seizure disorders, or other disabilities.

Photo credit to [Ndispensable](#) on [Unsplash](#).

For more information, [read the article by SevenDaysVT](#).



GREEN MOUNTAIN SELF-ADVOCATES HOSTS ITS BIGGEST EVENT OF THE YEAR

The annual [Voices and Choices](#) conference took place in Burlington, Vermont with the theme "20 years of making change". It offered 22 workshops, dancing, a talent show, and flash mob, and was sold-out by the first week of May.

Over 650 self-advocates, family members, and allies attended the celebration.

Keynote speaker [Emily Ladau](#), described her life as an advocate and published writer as two decades of photos proudly displayed the dedication, unity, and smiling faces of conference participants. She encouraged conference participants to share their stories, make their own choices, and use their voice proudly. Ladau said, "We need to show people we are active members of the community."

The conference is hosted by the Green Mountain Self-Advocates, with sponsorships from disability groups, including the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council. There are currently 21 self-advocacy groups through out Vermont.

Interested in attending next year? [Like the Green Mountain Self-Advocates on Facebook](#) and be one of the first to hear about registering for Voices and Choices 2019.

WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF Vermont-SNAP?



Photo credit to the [Vermont Image Relay](#).

People who are elderly, with disabilities, or are temporarily in a place where they are unable to work, are nervous that the renewed [Farm Bill proposed by Congress](#) will leave many vulnerable people hungry.

U.S. House Republicans are looking to adjust food stamp requirements to put pressure on people to "get back on their feet". To receive food stamps individuals and families must be 130% above the poverty level, have few assets, and work 20 or more hours per week.

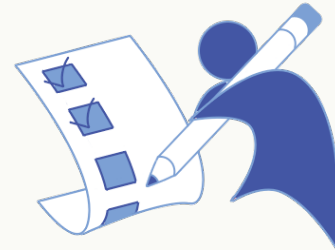
Currently the [Vermont Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program](#) (also known as SNAP) has over 75,000 Vermonters who rely this food assistance benefit.

For more information, [read or watch the article on WCAX](#).

SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE...

VermontABLE has reached 150 people! This means 150 people have [opened accounts to save](#) and invest by:

- choosing the plan that works best for them.
- putting money aside for qualified disability-related expenses.
- enjoying tax-free earnings
- accessing their accounts anywhere through the internet.



What is VermontABLE?

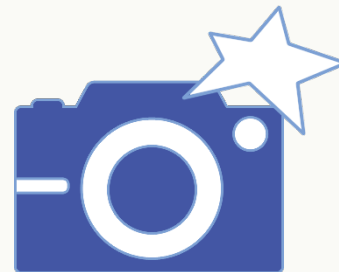
VermontABLE is a savings program sponsored by the Vermont State Treasurer's Office that uses new federal rules to allow someone with an eligible disability to save and invest without losing certain public benefits, like Medicaid and SSI.

Visit the website and [find-out if VermontABLE is a good choice for you and your loved ones](#).

WE WANT TO SHARE YOUR PHOTOS

VTDDC is looking to expand its stock photographs of Vermonters with disabilities and their families, that show inclusion, productivity, and capability.

Look through your photo albums and find your favorites!
We are thankful for anything you're willing to share.



Email us at vtddc@vermont.gov with the photos attached and subject line "I am Vermont".

WHAT'S UP, UNDER THE BIG DOME?

VTDDC is at the State House closely monitoring policy that could impact Vermonters with developmental disabilities...

The budget proposed by the Governor in January cut funding for developmental disability services by more than 4 million dollars. The budgets passed by the House and by Senate included money for the services cut in the Governor's budget. A conference committee worked out the differences between the two legislative budgets and adopted a final budget late Saturday night, May 12. The Governor has announced that he will veto the budget, and he has called the legislature back into session. Now the Legislature must write a new budget or try to override the Governor's veto. Therefore, we might not know the fate of the funding for developmental disability services until later this month. Stay tuned!



In other news, H. 897, which requires the implementation of certain inclusive best practices in public schools and restructures special education funding, has passed the legislature and gone to the Governor's desk. The Governor can sign the bill, veto the bill, or let the bill become law without his signature. H. 897 also reinforces the requirement that private schools receiving public funds must accept special education students and deliver the services in their Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

SAVE THE DATE for the next Quarterly Meeting



Council members work together to increase awareness about the needs of Vermonters with disabilities and encourage systems change. They are expected to attend four day-long meetings each year and to be active participants on a committee or work group.

When: **Thursday, June 28, 2018**

Where: Marlboro Graduate Center, Brattleboro, Vermont

The mission of VTDDC is to help build connections and supports that bring people with developmental disabilities, and their families, in the heart of Vermont Communities.