



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.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN OPEN FOR COMMENT

Many people with disabilities rely on public transportation to get around Vermont. How well is your region served by available bus routes? Can you get to work, recreation, and important appointments? What are your needs and ideas?

Green Mountain Transit has recently undertaken a comprehensive study of future transportation needs.

Your comments are welcome at their Blog (<http://ridegmt.com/study-feedback/>) or directly to GMT's Sr. Transit Planner, Rachel Kennedy at rkennedy@ridegmt.com



NEW INSIGHT ON WHAT'S SUSTAIN-ABLE

There are 8 million Americans with disabilities under the age of 26 who qualify to open an ABLÉ savings account, but is that pool big enough for ABLÉ to thrive?

With just over 17,000 accounts currently open nationwide in the new [Achieving a Better Life Experience Act \(ABLE\)](#) Savings Program, Congress is considering enhancing the program. The [ABLE Age Adjustment Act](#) would raise the age of onset for a qualifying disability from prior to 26 to prior to 46 so that millions more people with disabilities can take advantage of this savings tool.

390,000 open accounts will be needed if ABLÉ is to make it past its five-year anniversary, according to the National Association of State Treasurers.

This legislation is receiving a boost from a recent report by the [National Association of State Treasurers \(NAST\)](#), which some advocates interpreted as saying ABLÉ enrollment would need to accelerate if the program is to be sustainable. However, NAST issued a recent clarification stating:

“ABLE Programs are not in jeopardy... ABLÉ accounts across the nation are growing and already providing benefits to many thousands of individuals with

disabilities across the country."

ABLE accounts are intended to help individuals with disabilities have financial savings without reducing the public benefits they receive. So far 39 states --- including Vermont -- have opened ABLE Savings Programs.

To learn more about Vermont ABLE, go to: <https://www.vermontable.com/>



VermontABLE currently has over 150 account holders. **Register online today** and join others in making ABLE stay sustainable.

For more information, [read the brief report by the National Association of State Treasurers.](#)



Vermont ranks #13 on the list of expensive states to rent.

THE AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROBLEM

Vermont renters struggle to find homes that consume less than half of their monthly incomes, and often have to sacrifice other necessities just to stay in good standing with their landlords.

The [National Low-Income Housing Coalition](#) (NLIHC) has released their 2018 reports and the statistics aren't good. A critical look at apartments titled "[Out of Reach](#)" nationally compares all states and the average cost of rent, wages, and hours. The statistics vary from affordable to implausible.

NLIHC also has a report titled "[The Gap](#)" which describes the number of affordable rental homes within a state - Vermont ranks better, but the report does not describe whether the houses available meet housing code.

What are the facts?

- Vermont is one of 17 states that demand an hourly wage of \$20.00 or more to afford a modest apartment.
- 65% of Vermont renters are burdened by housing costs.
- There are 21,410 renters and only 12,145 rental homes that are affordable to those with low income in Vermont.
- 29% of Vermont renters are people with disabilities.
- Rent must be \$241 dollars or lower to be affordable to those that receive Social Security Income.

For more information, see the specific pages for Vermont:

- [2018 Ranking from Highest cost to Lowest](#)
- [2018 Vermont Housing Profile](#) are affordable to those with low income.

SUPREME COURT RAISES STANDARDS FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

In the latest chapter of a landmark special education case, the Douglas County School District has paid a



Children with special education needs are entitled to ambitious IEP goals that advance their learning and development.

\$1.32 million settlement to the family of “Andrew F,” a student with autism who is at the heart of a groundbreaking Supreme Court decision.

The case, known as *Endrew F. vs. Douglas County School District* lasted for seven years and led to a [2017 U.S. Supreme Court decision](#) that raised the standard schools must meet in educating students with disabilities. The settlement is expected to raise public awareness about the higher standard and spur greater public investment in educating students with disabilities.

For more information, [read the article on DisabilityScoop](#), and see an [Endrew F. Advocacy Toolkit](#) for parents.



People with disabilities are seven times more likely to be sexually assaulted.

Photo credit to [Lorna Scubelek](#) on [Unsplash](#).

THE PUBLIC WANTS JUSTICE FOR VICTIMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE

Trigger warning: Both NPR links in this written summary lead to [real audio stories with graphic descriptions](#). You may choose to not play the audio and just read the article.

Amidst the #MeToo movement and inspired by a [NPR special series](#), legislators from various states have proposed laws to identify and stop abuse, as well as prosecute abusers.

Many look to respond to sexual abuse by preventing it from happening. There needs to be more education about sex, healthy relationships, and how to identify abuse. Some states would like to see youth with disabilities in the classroom during these discussions, instead of pulled out to receive other services.

The second step to empowering victims is to allow more follow-up after abuse has been suspected, but communication can be the biggest hurdle. Some people with disabilities have trouble recounting their abuse to family, police, prosecutors, and other authorities, which leads advocates to ask, "Why aren't we doing more?"

The United States Congress has proposed to continue funding the [Violence Against Women Act](#) (it helps women with disabilities who've been raped).

California, Florida, Massachusetts, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania are drafting laws to aid police and investigators who wish to take the accused to trial.

For more information, [read or listen to the article on NPR](#).

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. It only takes a few moments to look through your photo albums and find your favorites... Who knows, your picture may be showcased on our [Facebook](#), in our [Newsletter](#), or in one of our publications! We appreciate anything you're willing to send, and BIG KUDOS to the Vermonters who've already emailed us to share their accomplishments and passions.



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...

It came down to the wire. On Monday, June 25th, the Legislature finished work on its third budget. Governor Phil Scott had vetoed the first two budgets that the Legislature passed, and no one knew if he would veto the third as well. To avoid a shut-down, the State needed to have a budget in place on July 1st, which at the time was a mere 5 days away. One Tuesday, June 26th, the Governor announced that he would let the third budget become a law without his signature. In other words, he would not veto the budget, and there would be no government shut-down in Vermont.

This was good news for disability rights activists who were concerned that a shut-down would create hardship and confusion for people who rely on services from the State. In other good news the final budget includes funding for many services, including developmental disability services, that the Governor had proposed cutting.



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, September 27, 2018

Where: [Vocational Rehab](#), St. Johnsbury, Vermont

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