

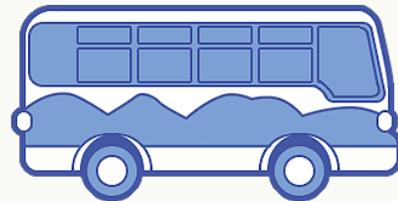


**Council Connections** brings the latest news on disability rights, resources that promote inclusion, and opportunities for advocacy to individuals with developmental disabilities and their family members living in the heart of Vermont Communities.

## VTDDC HAS MOVED TO MONTPELIER!

**The Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council has a new place to call home - the Capitol Plaza.**

We're excited to share that VTDDC's offices are just a hop, skip, and a jump away from the State House, our partners and allies, and all of you! We're still working on street and room signage, but the hotel's front desk is more than happy to give you directions to Suite 342 if you ever want to say "Hi."



Want to send us mail? Post your letters to:  
Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council  
100 State Street, Suite 342  
Montpelier, VT 05633-0206

Can you believe directions to our old place ended with, "Park beside the cemetery..."?



## SOCIAL SERVICES RECEIVE A BOOST IN SENATE APPROPRIATIONS' BUDGET

**The Senate Appropriations Committee would like to have [H. 542 \(also known as "the big bill"\)](#) increase funding to services that help low-income and vulnerable Vermonters.**

The Vermont budget that will operate all government departments and services next year has a few unexpected, but not unwelcome, changes in the works.

Earlier this year the big bill passed the House and now sits in the Senate where it waits for its final reading. The Executive Director of the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council, Kirsten Murphy, recalls that over the last decade social services have not been keeping pace with inflation. The Council partnered with a number of agencies in 2018 to educate legislators about [Vermont's safety net](#) and [awarding designated agency staff a livable wage](#).

There's always time to advocate. This is the first year of the two year biennium - whatever doesn't pass this month may still have a chance when legislators return to the State House in

**"In 2018, the Legislature promised the Designate Agency System a two-step increase in wages. We saw the first increase, but for workers supporting people with disabilities, that crucial second bump has not yet happened."**

- Kirsten Murphy, Executive Director of VTDDC

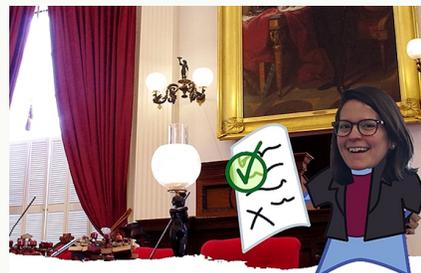
The Senate Appropriations Committee agreed to the following adjustments:

- \$1.9 million more annually to [Reach-Up](#).
- 1 million more annually to [Medicaid](#) for seniors in residential care facilities.
- \$2.1 million more annually to [Department of Children and Families](#).
- \$2.5 million more annually to give raises to mental health and disability service workers.
- \$2.5 million to Vermont State Colleges (to reduce student tuition).

The Senate Appropriations Committee made a small reduction to the [Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center](#), saying the state should rely less on the thirty (30) bed facility in coming years. They've appropriated one-time funding to the Department of Children and Families to help with that transition.

This week Legislators are meeting in a conference committee to work out the differences between the House and Senate versions of the fiscal year 2020 budget. They hope to have a final bill approved in time to adjourn on May 17, 2019

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



the House of Representatives

Wondering how a bill gets passed at the State House? Visit VTDDC on Facebook and [watch our latest "Good to Know"](#) - a show where we ask complex questions to get you simple the answers.



## HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION BLOCKED FROM TAKING PROACTIVE MEASURES

**Have you ever witnessed discrimination or been discriminated against, and wondered "Why isn't someone doing something?"**

The [Vermont Human Rights Commission](#) (VHR) is a governor-appointed board that oversees the investigation and resolution of complaints about discrimination in housing, public accommodations, or state employment.

To address an issue, the Commission must receive a formal complaint. Executive Director to the VHR, Bor Yang, sees this as a hindrance to their full potential. She testified before the Senator Judiciary Committee last week to request an amendment to [House Bill 518](#) (H.518) that would permit a more proactive approach in the case of law enforcement.

Yang asked the Senate Judiciary Committee to add language that would empower VHR to probe police records without a consumer complaint. She cited the case of former representative Kiah Morris as an example where the Commission could not address obvious discrimination because a formal complaint was never filed.

Beth Novotny, a lobbyist for the Vermont Police Association, countered, saying Yang's approach would allow "a fishing

Local and well-known disabilities advocate, Nate Besio, is one of five who serves the Vermont Human Rights Commission.

In 2018 the Vermont Human Rights Commission logged 826 phone calls, seven (7) informal complaints, and sixty-two (62) formal complaints.

expedition," encouraging VHR to search for problems instead of responding to them.

The Senate Judiciary Committee ultimately sided with the Vermont Police Association, but they would like to build a working group of advocates and professionals to perform outreach in the name of the VHR. Yang hopes for a simpler solution -- expanding the Commission's budget and hiring a full-time outreach person.

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

To learn about filing a complaint:  
<https://hrc.vermont.gov/how-to-file>



## REPUBLICANS CHALLENGE WIOA RULES

The Department of Education has been urged by eight (8) Republican members of Congress to revisit how the federal government implements the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA).

Set in place by the Obama Administration, WIOA emphasizes placing transition-age youth with disabilities in competitive, integrated employment over segregated settings. This has sharply reduced referrals to AbilityOne, a government program for people who are blind or have significant support needs.

According to a [report by the Developmental Disabilities Services Division](#) as of 2018 ...

- Only 1,323 workers with disabilities say their receive support.
- The average hourly wage is \$10.38.
- The average amount of hours worked per week is eight (8).

In a [letter to the Secretary of the Department of Education, Betsy DeVos](#), the Congressmen wrote,

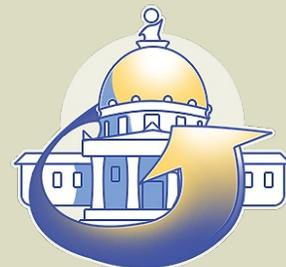
**"Many state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies have adopted a 'blanket denial' approach instead of conducting a case-by-case determination,"** the letter writes, **"... the previous Administration developed imprecise criteria defining 'integrated settings' in the context of competitive integrated employment."**

Disability advocates, however, are concerned that revising the rules may open the door to increased reliance on sheltered workshops where individuals are paid less than minimum wage and have little chance to develop marketable skills.

For more information [read the article by the Disability Scoop.](#)

## WHAT'S UP, UNDER THE BIG DOME?

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



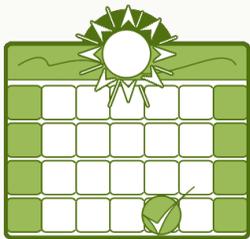
A much-needed fix for Vermont's Special Education Advisory Panel might not make it across the finish line this Session. Both the House and Senate passed a bill requiring the state's Special Education

Advisory Panel to comply with the federal rules for such panels by September 2019. However, the language that addresses the issue was moved into a larger education bill, H. 521, which is now stalled in a failed conference committee.

Advocates have long wanted to see stronger parent and student representation on the Special Education Advisory Panel. In fact, federal law requires that a majority of Panel members be individuals with disabilities or parents of individuals with disabilities. At last count, only 2 or 3 of Vermont's fourteen-member committee were people with disabilities or parents of students with disabilities.

Contact Sue, VTDDC's Senior Planner and Policy Analyst, by email for more details on what the Council is doing this legislative session:

[Susan.Aranoff@Vermont.gov](mailto:Susan.Aranoff@Vermont.gov)



## SAVE THE DATE for the next Quarterly Meeting

**When:** Thursday, June 27, 2019

**Where:** Location to be Announced

**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.

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.