Joint Fiscal Testimony on Governor Shumlin’s Proposed Budget Cuts

I’m Nicole LeBlanc from Montpelier. I am the Advocacy Director for Green Mountain Self-Advocates, a disability rights organization. I’m on the Autism Spectrum and I get Developmental Disabilities Services. I managed my services which enable me to work 30 hours a week and live on my own.

I am here today on behalf of Green Mountain Self-Advocates to ask you not to cut services, anybody’s services.

What values are we using to guide our decision-making?

The Governor’s office says it is taking a “balanced approach.” But how is it “balanced” if every time the state faces a shortfall they always “balance” the books on the backs of those who are least able to give something up.

There are 626,000 people who live in Vermont. You are only asking people who need services to make a sacrifice. You have lots of options. You could “balance” the books by raising taxes on those who can afford to give more. For example, last week it was reported that in about half of Vermont towns, people from out of state pay less property taxes then residents. How is that fair and balanced?

Today legislators are being asked to cut a total of 31 million dollars. Yet 6 million dollars or roughly 20% of the cut is coming out of developmental disabilities services, mental health and substance abuse programs. How is that a balanced approach?
Services for People with Developmental Disabilities have been cut over and over again.

- Cuts in December 2013 = 1.35%
- Cuts in 2011 = 2.6%
- Cuts in 2010 = 1%
- Cuts in 2009 = 3.75%
- Cuts in 2006 = 2%

The way our state raises and spends money is not working. We cannot afford to balance the budget on the backs of vulnerable people. Aren’t we at the point in time to consider keeping the safety net and raise revenue and sharing our resources equitably?

Another balancing act I would like to point out is how smaller amounts of money spent now can minimize or put off big time spending in the future. For example, the proposed cuts to Developmental Disabilities Services in the areas of Flexible Family Funding and one time money can decrease opportunities for short-term supports to help a person get through a medical or some other crisis. When you eliminate safety valves that help a family or a person be proactive and solve a problem early you create situation where people go into crisis and it can cost more down the road.

I want to thank the committee members for listening to my testimony. Thank you.