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*DRVT is the **Protection & Advocacy System** for Vermont and our state's **Mental Health Care Ombudsman***

January 12, 2018

Representative Sam Johnson
Chairman
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
2304 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Representative John Larson
Ranking Member
Social Security Subcommittee
House Ways and Means Committee
1501 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC. 20515

Dear Chairman Johnson and Ranking Member Larson:

On behalf of Disability Rights Vermont, I write in strong support of H.R. 4547, the Strengthening Protections for Social Security Beneficiaries Act of 2017. Enactment of this legislation will provide critical protections for Social Security beneficiaries as well as needed reforms to the crucial representative payee program.

As Vermont's protection & advocacy system DRVT investigates abuse neglect and rights violations of people with disabilities and advocates for change that enhances their access to independent living and equal opportunity. We have long assisted individuals to be properly served by parties

Defending and Advancing the rights of people with disabilities.

Email at info@DisabilityRightsVT.org,

On the web: www.disabilityrightsvt.org

entrusted with the management of their finances and understand the benefit of honesty, clarity, transparency and respect for autonomy to a healthy relationship between individuals and their representative payees.

News stories, Office of Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports, and hearings held by the House Ways and Means Committee have demonstrated the need for changes in the representative payee program. Your bipartisan legislation proposes many important and needed changes that will streamline the program as well as take important steps to increase oversight of the representative payee program by funding the nationwide network of P&A systems to monitor how representative payees are administering the Social Security funds received by beneficiaries.

DRVT has the skills and experience to evaluate institutional representative payees and we have conducted trainings of persons with payees as well as agencies providing the service. We have resolved cases in which payees have erred in properly managing funds, preventing economic hardship for those clients. H.R.4547 would enhance our ability to assist in these sorts of cases and our experience will improve the Social Security Administration's oversight of this fundamental program.

We greatly appreciate your work together on this important issue and your introduction of this critical legislation. We stand ready to work with both of you to quickly get this important legislation enacted into law. Should you have any questions or need more information, please be in touch with me, Ed Paquin, at Ed@DisabilityRightsVt.org or (802)-229-1355, ext.102.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ed Paquin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ed Paquin, Executive Director