

We asked communities to help us identify priorities that we could share. These additional needs expressed by our community partners have a lot to tell us about ourselves and the kinds of systems we expect people to tolerate. It may sound like an amalgamation of different needs that can't all be met, but they all stem from a system that maintains inequality. Search deeper, and you will find a singular resounding message, which is that all of us deserve care. All of us deserve consideration. We have built a system that does not attend equally to different people and the result is that specific communities continue to bear the burden of these disparities. They show up in our schools and health outcomes and economic well-being. These outcomes, in turn, create additional burdens that we all must carry responsibility for. As you think about our budget, We are asking you to consider not just the present cost, but the cost of historical injustice and the cost of a future where needs continue to be unmet. Some needs identified by our partners include:

The systems we've created leave glaring inequities in the ability of communities to identify and respond to essential health needs

- Universal, accessible Health Care ([S.240/H.721](#) are steps in the right direction)

They sustain economic hardship and inequality. We can reduce the burden on all human services by promoting stability instead of crisis.

- Universal Basic Income ([H.427/S.92](#) are a step towards this for a specific population)
- Tax credits as a proven, impactful way to get cash to families.

They create the conditions wherein isolation, othering, and trauma is perpetuated in the institutions intended to prepare our children for the future. Positions developed with ESSER funds are now at risk of disappearing, while the issues they are designed to address remain. Steps toward attending to these issues should include investments positions designed to create the conditions of equity, such as an equity director to oversee implementation of the [Ethnic Studies IRIS framework](#) ([H.682](#) and [S.282](#) advocate for similar changes), and attend to ongoing disparities, such as a fully funded full-time special education attorney position at Disability Law Project to provide legal assistance to families of children with disabilities at school, as well as support to attract and retain BIPOC teachers and move toward more inclusive and equitable curriculum. Further investments should also consider:

- The growing need for school renovations (this is a huge burden on school budgets and takes funds away from crucial student support), affordable housing as it relates to sustaining the teacher workforce, and related implementation funds for Act 1. Ideally both at the state and local level.
- More equity equity infrastructure in schools supported by the budget. The survey results we got from around the state showed that racism is prolific in our schools and yet, with ESSER money running out, equity is being deprioritized. [H.511](#) -VSARN

Foundational community support to meet the complex needs of families most impacted by inequitable systems:

- Additional resources for BIPOC-led orgs
- More resources to families - particularly those who are working to stay united. When kids with complex needs are living with their family of origin, parents are often asked to navigate supports that take full rotating teams in group settings. These parents also need to work to pay the household bills. Kids shouldn't have to leave the home to get all of that support that they require.
- Fund opportunities to connect and support each other
- Kinship family support
- More money for mental health and social services, less for punitive oversight
- [Support for youth transitioning out of foster care \(H.644\)](#) access to records, [H.717](#))
- Access to services for folks without SS #s ([H.719](#)), ([H.817](#))
- More advocates for housing and intentional consideration of the needs of community members without social security numbers. Case managers are important, but they help you navigate the timelines, paperwork, and existing structures. We need more people who are invested in getting our needs met, especially if the path forward isn't defined yet.
- Additional legal staff in the Family Law Project of VT Legal Aid.

Budget priorities may reflect what we strive to keep in balance, but the lived experience of children tells us who we are. Right now, our children are telling us a story about ourselves, and it is in the best interest of our state and our future to listen. Vermont's communities are telling us that the fullness of human existence is greater than any single issue or any single place. Children's needs are not limited to home, care, or schools, to doctor's offices and dental clinics—they are all of these things. When we drop or postpone attendance to one area of concern, the suffering that results resounds across settings. The budget presents an opportunity to see things as whole rather than pit them against each other.