

Meghan Young
Team Leader- Early Intervention
Northwestern Counseling and Support Services

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My name is Meghan Young, and I am the Team Leader for the Chittenden County Early Intervention program- Northwestern Counseling & Support Services (NCSS). I work in Chittenden County and live in Franklin County. I have worked in support of children and families for 13 years in different programs throughout NCSS. I am here today in support of a 6.5% (\$14.6M) Medicaid rate increase.

I would like to thank the legislature for their ongoing support of the Designated Agency/Specialized Service Agency system. The funding increases we received in FY23 and FY24 helped to begin to turn the curve on vacancy rates in our programs and improve retention rates. We continue to struggle with a program that is not fully staffed, and we have never been able to staff the program to its fullest potential due to the low wages. We have had at least 6 position vacant on a team of 19 people for over 3 years. While we have been able to add new staff to our team, veteran staff leave the job for other jobs that offer predictable salary increases. Vacancies in our system of care have a ripple effect on individuals and families, communities, and the overall health of Vermont. It is clear that the legislature recognizes and is supportive of those who do this valuable and important work.

At my agency, I am constantly reminded of the reasons why we need your support. My team has been understaffed since September 2020, with multiple vacancies that I have been unable to fill. I only have 8 staff to provide the necessary supports for 206 of our youngest Vermonters and their families. This is an entitlement program, and we are not able to turn any family away. This means that staff are overworked and families are underserved. The compensation that we provide is not adequate for the requirements and the demands of our work. Families often wait for longer than they should have to and often voice their frustrations about the lack of services that are provided to their children. Children who are not able to receive the level of support necessary to catch up with their same aged peers, often require a higher level of supports once they reach school age which is causing higher school budgets.

To support Vermonters, the state should continue its investment in the DA/SSA system. A Medicaid rate increase of 6.5% (\$14.6M) will support our ability to retain and recruit the necessary staff to provide services to children birth to three. Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

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