

TO: House and Senate Committees on Appropriations

Submitted by: Melissa Appleton, Lund Post Permanency Services Coordinator, melissaa@lundvt.org

DATE: February 13, 2024

RE: Post Permanency Services Program, FY2025 Funding Request

Increase base funding by +\$300k for a new PMPM of \$385

Dear Representatives,

Thank for the opportunity to provide written testimony. We value your time and work on important matters impacting Vermont's children and families.

I have been Lund's Coordinator of Post Permanency Services for the past seven years and prior to that provided direct services to adoptive families for ten years. Through this work, I have become very familiar with the needs and challenges that Vermont adoptive and guardianship families face. I also see daily the positive impact of Post Permanency Services and how critical it can be in supporting stability and resiliency for these families. Yet, Post Permanency Services have not seen an increase in the contract funds for years. I encourage you to please consider increasing base funding for Post Permanency Service Programs by \$300,000 annually.

Raising a child is hard for everyone. Parenting through adoption or guardianship can have added complexities and challenges. A majority of the children served through Post Permanency Services have been adopted through the VT Foster Care System and experienced early trauma prior to adoption. We are working with families whose children have experienced neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. Even for children who are placed with their adoptive families at birth, we are seeing increased numbers of children with in-utero exposure to traumatic stress and substances. We now know that trauma can impact brain development as well as other health outcomes (ACEs). Many of the children we serve struggle with relationships (attachment), learning difficulties, behavioral issues, poor self-esteem, and regulating their emotions. Furthermore, at the core of adoption is grief and loss. If children and youth are not supported in acknowledging these losses and grieving in healthy ways, this can also lead to emotional and behavioral struggles. Adoptive and guardianship caregivers are often navigating many of these pieces and need specialized services so they can best support their children.

That is where Post Permanency Services steps in. We understand all the unique needs connected to parenting through adoption and guardianship. A big part of what we do is providing parent coaching and education on early trauma, attachment, and normative adoption needs. This involves meeting regularly with caregivers to discuss challenges and strategies. As part of our support, we also help families connect to resources, services, and trainings focused on their child and family's needs. If families encounter obstacles in accessing services, we can provide school and treatment advocacy. Additionally, Post Permanency offers a variety of support groups across the state that provide essential connection and peer support for caregivers. Children do well when their parents do well. Post Permanency Services helps parents do their best.

Post Permanency Services provide critical and specialized support that cannot be found elsewhere in the system of care. Not only is our team knowledgeable about early trauma and community resources, they are adoption-competent. This includes experience working with kinship, transracial/transcultural, and

LGBTQ+ families. Families formed through adoption and guardianship need access to providers who understand the unique challenges they face. Post Permanency is that resource to families in Vermont.

Post Permanency Services have a positive reputation and have been a stable support to Vermont adoptive and guardianship families for years. In particular, we stayed strong through the pandemic and have continued to provide high quality support to families. This includes often filling gaps when other services have waitlists or are not available to families. This has been critical to families encountering intense stress and unable to access ongoing services through their designated agencies. While we have seen improvements in the system of care, it is no secret that school and mental health systems are still struggling to meet the needs of children and families. Post Permanency has been lifeline for adoptive and guardianship families given these ongoing challenges in our state.

Post Permanency Services has been underfunded for years. We are currently at a critical juncture as Lund is encountering increased costs associated with programming. We want to uphold high quality services but this is not sustainable under the current rate. Lund along with the other Post Permanency agencies are asking for a base increase of \$300,000 a year which would make our programs whole. This total base increase would raise the PMPM rate to \$385.00, the "break even rate." Lund's share of the total increased base would be \$90,000 based on the share of services that Lund provides.

Investing in adoptive families and Post Permanency can lead to better outcomes for children and families and fewer costs down the line for the state. Our preventative services focus on helping families thrive and increase resiliency, thus avoiding higher costs connected to children re-entering DCF custody or higher level of care placements. By strengthening adoptive and guardianship families our programs support healing for children and youth with early trauma and adverse childhood experiences. As a result, these children and youth are more likely to thrive as adults and members of their communities.

Thank you for considering this request for support for Post Permanency Services. We hope you can support us in our mission to provide this foundational help. Vermonters who are stepping up to embrace our kids need our continued support.

Our partnership with our legislators is one of our most valued assets. We welcome any follow up questions you may have and are so grateful for your time to consider this request.

Sincerely,

Melissa Appleton, LICSW
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Lund Post Permanency Services Coordinator