

Hello Everyone,

My name is Nikki Duran and I am a Family Services Supervisor in the Burlington District Office. I supervise the Juvenile Services Team and previously was a worker on this team for nearly 4 and a half years. The Burlington District Office has 5 identified juvenile services workers and collectively our team currently holds 88 cases. These 88 cases are made up of CHINS-C youth deemed to be beyond parental control, CHINS-D which are youth experiencing truancy or engaging in delinquent behaviors, youthful offenders and at times due to the needs of the office, CPS cases. If raise the age were be implemented as planned, this is the team that would absorb these cases in Chittenden County which would continue to raise our caseloads, and be detrimental to our quality of work with youth and families. When workers are overburdened the ones who suffer most are the youth and families we serve.

Due to our team of Juvenile Services workers having to support multiple case types, some of which we are the legal guardians for, the over 18 year olds often gets less case management support than would be ideal due to the impossible task of workers to triage all of the things they are responsible for to ensure child safety. If these youth were able to have access to more consistent case management time than what we are able to offer, which is likely primarily once a month face to face contact and follow-up with collaterals contacts, it would be reasonable to think we would see less recidivism and better outcomes for these youth. However, without additional resources either in the community without sole DCF oversight, it is of my personal opinion this would not be possible to manage effectively and would not increase positive outcomes for the youth 18 and above.

Throughout my last five years at DCF, I have seen an evolution of need within the Juvenile Services population and a depletion in the services we need to serve them, including in state resources for stabilization and treatment in a residential setting. Looking at the dashboards of the workers I supervise, 14 of these youth have concerns for accessing firearms illegally, and many more have had concerns for accessing weapons, aggression and violence in the community, and significant substance misuse. Currently, the state of Vermont does not have specific programming to target concerns for firearm violence, a resource desperately needed to address the safety issues in our community, and many times, the community resources we typically access to support these youth and families decline providing services due to the risk to staff. This leaves youth who desperately need support, connection, and treatment, in their same environment without the resources to make a change.

In previous sessions, you have heard from other DCF representatives about the shortcomings of our current high-end system of care and in hopes to not be repetitive from what you have already heard, I hope to give an anecdote about how those issues impact real youth and families in our community. Due to our juvenile justice system and child protection system being intertwined, it is impossible not to hold the impact that this issue has on our community as a

whole, and it is of my belief has an impact on the case management skill and treatment that would be provided to the incoming raise the age population.

Within the last month, we learned that a youth who had been considered for and denied from, multiple out of state residential would need to leave the short-term stabilization placement due to another youth needing the placement. We were left with the unfortunate choice to do what we could to make them safest in the community. This led to the youth needing to be staffed in our office because they would be too at risk unsupervised and did not yet have a school plan. This downtime without having the opportunity to thoughtfully engage in treatment and their education was a detriment to the youths progress. I share this anecdote to demonstrate that when our system is failing, the ones most negatively impacted are the youth and families we serve.

I could share many more stories like this, and the position that I am in as a supervisor is supporting the workers on my team with doing the best they can for the youth and families they serve and all of us needing to reconcile with the unfortunate reality that because of the position our system of care is in, from the lack of a locked stabilization treatment facility to community based agencies unable to safely support families who need it most, it isn't enough to do the work our community needs to be safe. Many of us, and many of you, do what we do to make a difference and while I believe philosophically in raise the age, due to my experience as a direct service worker supporting these youth, I worry if we do not pause while critical resources are being put into place, we will unintentionally do more harm than good to our community.

I appreciate your willingness to consider my testimony and thank you for your time.

-Nikki Duran