



Good morning,

Thank you for allowing me to speak in front of you all this morning. My name is Lindsey Trombley and I am the Executive Director of the Orange County Parent Child Center. I am fortunate to be a member of a network comprised of 14 other Parent Child Centers within the state of Vermont. Our Network is comprised of Parent Child Centers dedicated to supporting and strengthening families every day. Our strengths-based, multi-generation approach serves both children and their caregivers through our 8 Core Services and much more. We fill a vital role in our communities by meeting families where they are and cultivating deep relationships at critical moments.

Each of our Parent Child Centers serves our communities with 8 core services in mind. These services include home visits, early childhood services, parent education, community playgroups, parent support groups, concrete supports, community development and information and referral. Among those 8 core services each center is creative in offering support that meets their community needs.

In 2023 Parent Child Centers employed 400 employees. Those 400 employees interfaced with 18,656 children and 17,696 parents with a focus on our 8 core services. Of those parents receiving services, 94% reported feeling stronger and more confident as a parent working with a parent child center. 98% felt they received the help they needed and that was right for them.

Vermont is well known for its beauty, simplicity, and quaint towns. Neighbors helping neighbors, small businesses helping other businesses numerous human service agencies looking out for the people in Vermont.

In November/December 2023, Parent Child Centers conducted an internal transportation survey after concern that while our centers are offering these

services, people are unable to access them due to transportation barriers. The survey indicated that 90% of clients served brought transportation as a barrier to services to their workers. 72% of Families indicated that transportation is only partially available to them within parts of a region and 27% reported there was no transportation available. Families noted that transportation is available in more populated areas but is extremely limited in the rural areas, with public transportation hours at inconvenient times (i.e pick up at 5am, drop off at 7pm). This makes it a less viable option for families who are attempting to utilize the transportation for work or childcare where there are specific start/end times. Many times, the transportation that is provided is limited to the specific town therefore families do not have access to transportation outside their region. This creates challenges to attending medical appointments, therapy appointments, childcare and other needed services.

The Parent Child Centers can offer a small solution to this larger problem. With our PCC integrated grant funds, we can offer concrete support to families such as gas cards so they can attend an appointment, as well as help with car repairs and tires. This is if they have a reliable vehicle or a vehicle at all. Some Parent Child Centers have purchased vans to transport families to appointments while other centers have not been as fortunate to have the funds available to make such a large purchase.

We are thankful that there is an option in some regions like Green Mountain Transit, but transportation options vary widely region by region. Schedule restrictions and rural access eliminates some from being able to utilize this service. Some families have their own vehicles that are not safe or registered or they are without a license or lack insurance. If you have access to a car, you do not qualify for GMT Medicaid rides. Families aren't always able to plan for the required 24-hour notices to receive transportation. If you live far from the bus route, you cannot get a ride into town for appointments, etc. If you have a job that starts at 7am, there is no public transportation to get you close, let alone dropping off a child at child care first. If you have a late in the day appointment, you may have transportation there but not to return home. Our streets are not "bicycle friendly" for those wishing to use a bike, especially if you have a child seat attached. Some families must walk on busy roads with no sidewalk. A lot of families we work with do not have a car of their own so they must rely on buses, walking or rides from friends/family. This makes their travel options very limited and a lot of them say they prefer to walk because the bus options are so limited and often not on schedule.

When transportation is available there is often a fee associated with it. Vermonters are already financially struggling. We have seen a significant uptake in families utilizing food shelves, our family assistant funds and diaper bank. Every dollar is stretched and to have to save just a little bit more to access public transportation is stretching some families so much they simply cannot afford it. In turn, these families and their children remain at home isolated and unable to access vital and critical resources and support.

I don't bring these statistics and challenges to your attention thinking you are not already aware of the barrier families face. We recognize legislators, committees, and the public are all working hard to find a solution to a very (costly) challenging situation and we appreciate the time and work you put into this matter.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

Lindsey Trombley, Executive Director

Orange County Parent Child Center