



**Testimony to the House Appropriations Committee**

**Elizabeth Meyer, Executive Director, Child Care Resource, Williston, Vermont**

**Contact Information: Phone – 863-3367 x118, E-mail – emeyer@childcareresource.org**

**Child Care Referral Services**

**February 24, 2015**

**Proposal in the Governor's budget regarding Child Care Referral Services:**

- The proposal includes savings of \$200,000 from a budget of \$479,000 currently allocated to local agencies;
- It uses the remainder to move local services to a centralized system.

**My association has submitted an alternative proposal to the administration which continues Child Care Referral Service locally and also offers significant savings for the budget.**

**Local Child Care Referral Services are:**

- Aligned with the 12 AHS districts
- Universally provided to families;
  - Including those who are struggling with poverty and perhaps other challenges such as homelessness and domestic violence.
- Highly responsive to families facing child care challenges such as expulsion from child care;

**Vermont's families successfully find child care using local child care referral services so that they can go to work:**

- Around 2,700 families use the service each year and at least 75% are low-income.
- Our network's service performance exceeds State defined goals.

- With local services, families get help finding child care and accessing State funding to pay for it at the same place in their local community throughout their child care years.

**Centralization does not effectively replace local service:**

- In 2010, customer service for those applying for 3Squares, Fuel Assistance, and Medicaid was centralized as a method of saving money. However, when Vermont's low-income population experienced many difficulties in accessing benefits, local customer service was restored to communities and savings were not achieved as planned.
- Connecticut is often cited as a model for centralized child care referral through 211. However, in Connecticut, there are also 72 local family resource centers and many, if not all, help families find child care locally.
- The current proposal is also tied to a new centralized system called Help Me Grow that is funded by short term Race to the Top funds. This system has not yet been implemented nor proven to work in Vermont.

**What we propose:**

- VACCRRRA has completed an analysis of Child Care Referral Service cost and service demand.
- We have developed a preliminary proposal that will maintain local Child Care Referral services and provide the State approximately \$150,000.00 in savings to the bottom line.
- The Administration has indicated that they are interested in considering an alternative proposal and we will keep you updated as discussions continue.

Additional information is attached to this testimony. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your time today.

Attachments: Proposal to Commissioner Schatz and Deputy Commissioner Murphy  
Supporting Data and Information  
Letter from Ann Dillenbeck, Chittenden County CIS Coordinator  
Letter from David Young, South Burlington School Superintendent.



February 23, 2015

Commissioner Schatz and Deputy Commissioner Murphy,

I am writing on behalf of the Vermont Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies (VACCRRRA) regarding the proposed budget cut to Child Care Referral Services, one piece of the Community Child Care Services Agency (CCCSA) set of services. Thank you for meeting with us on February 10<sup>th</sup> and the opportunity to provide you with a counter proposal.

Child Care Referral Services are aligned with all AHS district-level services. At a minimum, they are integrated locally with child care financial assistance eligibility determination and professional development for child care providers. The services are imbedded within child/family serving agencies and help to maintain local and coordinated access to supports. This system is essential and effective for Vermonters with child care needs. In particular, Child Care Referral Services are:

- universally provided to all families,
- highly responsive to families facing child care challenges including expulsion from child care, and
- effectively and locally addressing the child care needs of Vermonters who are struggling with poverty and its associated life challenges, such as homelessness and domestic violence.

The overall FY'16 savings listed in the Governor's budget from cutting the CCCSA Referral program is \$200,000, but the total cut to VACCRRRA agencies is the full program cost of \$479,585 with the balance of funds going to support a new centralized system. Child Care Referral Services are a critical component of maintaining stability and functionality across the whole grant package of CCCSA services. This proposed cut will destabilize the system of child care support services that provides high quality services as evidenced by our current set of performance measures.

After careful consideration including the analysis of cost and service demand, we have developed a preliminary plan that will maintain child care Referral services in the community and provide the State approximately \$150,000.00 in savings to the bottom line.

We believe this represents a good faith effort on the part of the VACCRRRA membership and would appreciate an opportunity to meet and discuss our proposal with you in more detail, at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Scott Johnson

CC: Hal Cohen  
Alyson Richards



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**Child Care Referral Services**  
**February 24, 2015**

**Child Care Referral Service  
 Supporting Data and Information**

**How Many Families Used the Child Care Referral Service in FY14?**

- In FY14, 2,652 Vermont families were assisted in finding child care.
- At least three-quarters were eligible for child care financial assistance.
- Among 1,244 families currently eligible (January 2015) for financial assistance in Chittenden County, at least 45% have used the CCR child care referral service.

**How effective were the services provided?**

In FY14, 70% Referral Services families who contacted the programs we referred to them reported finding child care within two weeks (CCR data from FY14).

**Statewide Measures, Goals, and Actual Performance**

Performance Measure	Performance Goal	Actual Performance
Percent of clients who reported that they found the service helpful	80%	90%
Percent of clients who reported that they were offered information about quality indicators	80%	89%
The percent of regulated child care programs with updated information in the Bright Futures Information System in the past 3 months.	60%	67%

## **What do families want?**

From 2010 CDD Survey of Parents re: How they find child care:

- Parents equally valued:
  - "talking on the phone with someone who has information about child care in your area" 73% said it was at least good to have; 43.3% said it was important and;
  - "a place in your community where you can visit to talk to someone about child care information; 71% said it was at least good to have; 41.4% said it was important.

## **Why is local important?**

**Local knowledge helps make the best child care matches and goes beyond what a centralized service can know:**

- Local agencies gather community-specific information such as unregulated summer programs that are only advertised locally. Low-income parents need all the resources available to patch together summer when school is not in session.
- Local referral specialists learn more about child care providers and their programs through their own fieldwork and that of their colleagues which helps them guide families to the best available child care matches quickly.

**Navigating the human services system while balancing work and family and the challenges of poverty is difficult at best. A local place offering with multiple child care support services is more efficient for families with young children**

- Many local referral specialists are also local child care financial assistance specialists.
- Clients with children walk into our agencies every day for a number of reasons including child care referrals.
- Many low income parents pay for minutes on their cell phones and would prefer to receive services in person.

## **Is it worth the risk?**

Centralizing referral services will disrupt an established, well-performing system that serves one of our most vulnerable populations.

- In FY14, while 2,700 families called a VACCRRRA agency for a child care search, only 36 first called 211.

The proposal to centralize child care referral services is risky. Like the centralization of eligibility determination for financial benefits (e.g. 3 Squares, Child Care Financial Assistance, etc.) 5 years ago, it was developed as a way to save money. Is the budgeted funding enough? Will it really save more money than VACCRRRA agencies have proposed? The proposal is slated for implementation by July 1, 2015. Is it worth the risk?

# CIS

## Children's Integrated Services of Chittenden County

February 6, 2015

Dear Reeva, Ken, Breena, Monica, and Aly,

I am writing on behalf of Chittenden's CIS Administrative and Intake Teams in response to the administration's proposal to remove child care referral services from the community-based system of child care supports. We discussed this proposal during our most recent meetings and request its withdrawal for the following reasons:

- Child care referral services are closely linked with CIS services. Finding child care is often an essential step in stabilizing a family in crisis and in meeting a family's goals of joining or staying in the workforce while optimizing their child's development. When CIS providers support families in identifying an affordable, quality early care and education program, they either work closely with the local Referral Specialist or rely on the CIS Child Care Coordinator's co-location and regular collaboration with that person. Placing child care referral services in a state-wide system would disengage a local partnership that facilitates the work of CIS providers and contributes to CIS' positive impact in families' lives.
- Families seeking child care often have related needs, such as supporting a child who has been asked to leave a previous program, help paying for child care, identifying quality child care, and transportation. Local child care resource and referral agencies are currently a one-stop shop for such a variety of needs. As slots become available in programs with quality recognition, Referral Specialists, Provider Professional Development staff, CIS Specialized Child Care providers, and members of the CCFAP team can quickly notify one another and help families searching for care connect with those programs. Local knowledge that supports the most effective child care referrals.
- Community based child care referral is a specialized service. It can be provided in person, in conjunction with other services. It often requires multiple calls with a family, the family's primary service coordinator, and programs which may have newly available slots. A centralized call center like 211 is designed to make initial connections between people and service, "a first step" toward solving everyday problems or when people face difficult times. Our current Child Care Referral Specialists collaborate with other local professionals to support families as long as they seek assistance, usually until they find child care.
- While exploring the 2010 proposal to centralize CCFAP Eligibility Determination, community-based services were found to be more cost effective and preferred by clients. Until now, the plans for staffing Help Me Grow within 211 have been conservative: two to three Child Development Coordinators. Help Me Grow would need to add many more staff positions. The current quality of service could not continue for the proposed amount of \$279,585. Placing referral services in the context of a new initiative launched with time limited grant funding puts them at risk. Past experience predicts that it will cost more to conduct child care referral through Help Me Grow than it will to sustain it as a community-based service.

*Your CIS team can answer questions or concerns about:*

*Healthy child development*

*Pregnancy or Post-partum*

*Social, emotional and behavioral health of children under 6*

*Family support services*

*Links to community resources*

1110 Prim Road  
Colchester, VT  
05446

802-860-4426

We welcome further discussion with you and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,  
*Ann Dillenbeck*

Ann Dillenbeck, CIS Coordinator

**Every child, pregnant woman and family matters in Vermont**  
[www.dcf.state.vt.us/cdd/cis](http://www.dcf.state.vt.us/cdd/cis)



# SOUTH BURLINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT

500 DORSET STREET  
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February 10, 2015

Aly Richards  
Governor's Office  
109 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05609

Dear Aly,

I am writing to express my concern to the proposal in the Governor's budget that would remove the child care referral service from local agencies and centralize it as part of 211.

As you know, I am passionate about investing in local relationship-based systems and services that support and connect families raising young children from before birth. Child care referral services housed in community-based organizations along with other important child care support services strengthen this system. They offer locally informed child care expertise and create relationships with families that support them through their child care years.

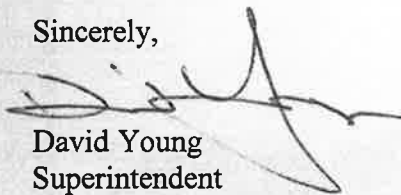
In our district we work hard through our Growing Kids South Burlington initiative to build upon the foundation of services provided by our local partners. We use a range of community-based strategies to increase families' awareness of the services available. The proposal to centralize this service will disrupt this foundation and confuse families.

I understand that this proposal is related to the new Help Me Grow initiative, which is also slated to be housed at 211. In my view, 211 is not the place for relationship-based services. My recommendation is to withdraw the proposal to centralize child care referral services and consider how to implement Help Me Grow through existing community-based organizations.

The early childhood system is complex and can be confusing. It's taken me quite a while to develop a basic understanding of how it all fits together. Growing Kids South Burlington created a service system "map" that uses a flower garden metaphor and this has helped me immensely. With that in mind, I recommend that we keep watering and nurturing the system we've planted rather than uprooting it and starting again. More specifically, keep child care referral services in community-based agencies where parents know how to find them and local relationships can grow. When adding new services, have them take root locally.

I would be happy to talk with further with you about this.

Sincerely,



David Young  
Superintendent

Cc: Ken Schatz, DCF Commissioner  
Reeva Murphy, DCF Deputy Commissioner, Child Development Division



February 23, 2015

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing on behalf of the Children's Integrated Services (CIS) Steering Committee representing Newport and St. Johnsbury AHS Districts. Our administrative team has discussed the administration's proposal to remove child care referral services from our local community-based system of child care supports. In our region, Northeast Kingdom Community Action (NEKCA) in Newport and Kingdom Child Care Connection (KCCC) at Umbrella in St. Johnsbury provide these important services. NEKCA and KCCC are two of twelve agencies across Vermont who are fundamental to the complex system of child care services.

These agencies and the services that they provide to children and families; child care providers and community partners are essential to providing and linking quality services to our integrated system. Families depend on these agencies for referrals during their search for child care- often of which is a challenging experience. Most of these families also need support with financial assistance or other child care services (i.e. Family Support or Children with Special Needs Child Care).

The proposal to centralize child care referral services is less efficient, less effective and less responsive than providing these referral services within each region. The current system promotes face to face interactions, encourages relationship building and provides an opportunity to meet a family's needs without the burden of multiple agency interactions. In addition, the knowledgeable staff are able to support families by providing effective child care referrals. These successful referrals promote quality child care experiences for children and their families and support positive outcomes.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me @ (802) 334-5335 or [dawn.powers@neklsvt.org](mailto:dawn.powers@neklsvt.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Dawn M. Powers'.

Dawn M. Powers

Coordinator  
Children's Integrated Services –Newport/ St. Johnsbury AHS Districts  
55 Seymour Lane  
Newport, VT 05855