



Dear Chair Pugh and Members of the House Human Services Committee:

We were disappointed to see that the Governor's FY2017 budget recommendation did not allocate the necessary resources to cover anticipated increased costs to the **Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)**. CCFAP is an important resource for lower-income Vermont families to enroll their children in quality early care and learning programs while parents work or attend school and also supports children in the care of the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF).

CCFAP has been underfunded for many years, and the strain on the program continues to grow due to increasing demands on the program. CCFAP needs increased funding to sustain current services and meet growing demand.

One major driver of increasing demand is due to Vermont's opiate crisis. As you have heard from DCF leadership, an unprecedented number of young children 0-5 are coming into DCF custody due to opiate issues. Through CCFAP, these children are eligible to receive 100% tuition assistance for child care programs. High-quality child care can provide a trauma-informed, stable and loving environment for many of these children. However, this increasing demand for services combined with regular annual growth is quickly escalating the burden on an already underfunded program.

We estimate that CCFAP will need a budget increase of approximately \$1 million in FY17 to maintain current service levels and meet increasing demand. Level funding, as the Governor has recommended, effectively cuts the program.

Without a budget increase of \$1M, we anticipate DCF will need to cut services or create a waiting list – something that we have never had in Vermont. Waiting lists are not only difficult to manage, but can also be a serious challenge for families working their way out of poverty. When a parent finally gets a job or when the childcare slot finally opens up, being placed on a waiting list can make change impossible for low-income families.

In addition to addressing the urgent need for a \$1M increase, funding for the program has not kept pace with increasing child care costs, **leaving a \$9.1 million funding gap in the program**. The result of this gap results in limiting parents' ability to access quality child care and early learning programs. We are not asking for these additional dollars now, but want the Committee to be aware of this ever-growing gap and its direct and serious impact on Vermont's children, families, providers and economy.

Vermont's families need help now. Waiting lists and program reductions will make the path out of poverty even harder, and children in DCF custody need help now. CCFAP is a critical tool in the state's efforts to respond to both the economic challenges and the public health crisis impacting our communities. Please support Vermont's children and families by calling for increased funding for FY17 in your letter to the House Appropriations Committee.

Sincerely,
Robyn Freedner-Maguire

Campaign Director