

House Appropriations Committee Testimony
February 11, 2016
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As most of you know, I spent the last several years advocating on issues of domestic and sexual violence and working with many of you to ensure that survivors of violence are supported and their rights are protected. I've now moved very far “upstream” and am working at Let's Grow Kids, on an issue that I firmly believe holds the keys to solving so many of the problems facing our communities and our state budget.

Let's Grow Kids is a public awareness and engagement campaign about the important role that high-quality, affordable child care can play in supporting the healthy development of Vermont's children during their first five years—the most important years for laying a foundation for success in relationships, in school and in life. Unfortunately, the critically important program that provides access to quality child care for Vermont's lowest-income children, the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), has been chronically underfunded and is effectively cut in the Governor's recommended budget for FY17.

CCFAP is an important resource for lower-income Vermont families to enroll their children in quality child care programs while parents work or attend school. However, funding for the program has not kept pace with inflation, limiting parents' ability to access quality child care programs and leaving a funding gap of more than \$10 million in the program.

We estimate that CCFAP will need a budget increase of at least \$1 million in FY17 just to sustain current service levels and meet increasing demands. Unfortunately, the administration's proposed budget does not include this increase. Level funding is effectively a budget cut for CCFAP. Over the past several years, CCFAP has seen increasing numbers of children utilizing the program, and the number of children receiving CCFAP tuition assistance for high-quality programs has been increasing, a key indicator of Vermont's success to ensure that all Vermont children are ready for school.¹ Without a budget increase, the program will not be able to keep pace with increasing needs, which could result in a program waitlist for the first time in recent memory.

Let's Grow Kids is a part of a coalition of organizations concerned that these significant funding challenges have direct and serious impacts on Vermont's children, families and child care providers. We strongly urge you to preserve this critically important resource for Vermont's children, families, employers and communities by allocating at least enough funding to prevent waiting lists. We must not roll back the important gains we've made in supporting children.

¹ Act 186 AHS Scorecard: <https://app.resultsscorecard.com/Indicator/Embed/31045?navigationCount=1>