



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

February 22, 2016

Rep. Mitzi Johnson
Chair
House Appropriations Committee

Via Email

Dear Chairwoman Johnson:

The Greater Burlington YMCA serves 2,000 children per year in licensed early child care and school age programs. As roughly 500 of these children qualify for tuition assistance through Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP), the Y is uniquely qualified to see the financial impact child care can have on struggling families. It is this perspective that prompts us to strongly encourage you to increase funding for Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP).

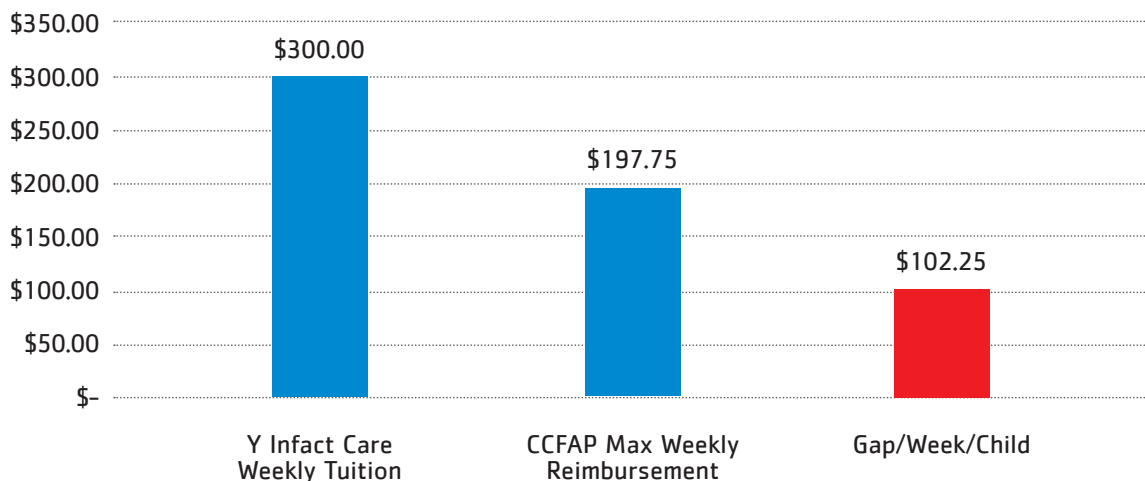
All families deserve the opportunity to choose child care based on quality, and not on price. Likewise, child care providers should not be forced to use ability to pay as a criterion for enrollment in their programs. The need for an increase in CCFAP funding is critical, and without it access to high quality child care will be diminished for those who need it most.

Access to high quality child care is essential for all children, particularly those who are eligible for state tuition assistance:

- It helps to ensure that they are prepared for kindergarten and do not fall behind academically.
- It connects their families with other needed services such as early intervention, food programs, and a medical/dental home.
- It provides structure and consistency to children whose families are often in flux and have unstable living situations.

Unfortunately, the current CCFAP tuition assistance rates do not cover the cost of care, especially for infants and toddlers.

CCFAP Maximum Infant Tuition Assistance vs. YMCA Tuition



Because the Y's goal is to keep our programs accessible to all, we currently cover the family "co-pay" of \$102.25 per week. This practice is becoming more and more difficult to sustain since our expenses to provide care increase each year while the CCFAP assistance rates remain the same.

A compounding issue is the program's income eligibility threshold. A family of four earning more than \$47,700 per year is not eligible to receive any state tuition assistance. High quality infant care costs approximately \$15,000 per year, which is far beyond what most moderate- and low-income families can afford to pay. These families need financial assistance beyond what most individual providers can offer.

A clear illustration of the growing pressure upon working families is the increased need seen by the Y. **The amount of financial assistance provided by the Y to families in our licensed early child care and school age programs increased from \$115,000 in 2010 to \$330,000 in 2015.** While we are committed to keeping our programs accessible, our ability to sustain this level of growth is not guaranteed, and the ever-increasing subsidy makes it harder for us to increase staff wages, create new programs and hire additional staff.


The end result is an uneven playing field that decreases access to high quality child care for certain families based on income. It also discourages providers from meeting the community need for high quality child care. For example:

- Providers may limit the number of children whom they take into a program because it is simply too expensive to cover the "co-pay" for children receiving state tuition assistance. The Y is the largest child care provider in Vermont and yet it struggles with this balance every day.
- Providers cannot always offer the level of financial assistance needed by families who just miss the state's income eligibility cutoff but who cannot afford to pay for quality care. These families may be forced into a lower quality child care option based on their inability to pay.
- **The Y maintains a 150+ person wait list for infant/toddler care. Although we would love to meet the community need for high quality care, we simply cannot afford to create more infant/toddler slots.**

While finding the money to fund an increase to CCFAP may seem a daunting task, it is essential we make this investment now. You are well aware of the countless studies that have shown the positive impact that access to high quality early child care has throughout a child's life. Many others have spoken quite eloquently on this point. We do, however, find ourselves struck by one particular result of high quality child care – the decreased chance of incarceration. The cost of incarceration is exponentially higher than ensuring access to quality early education and is a cost that we all can agree comes too late.

Please provide an increase in CCFAP funding for FY 17 so that we can begin to meet the needs of our state's most vulnerable low-income citizens.

Sincerely,



Pam Mackenzie
Interim CEO

cc: Members of the Committee



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THE IMPACT OF QUALITY CHILD CARE

We've included just a few of many stories that demonstrate the importance of high quality child care. Our ability to continue meeting the needs of children and families like these is at risk without additional state funding.

Four-year-old M came to the Y at a time when he, his mother and younger sister were living at Lund and had recently reunited as a family. M had experienced significant trauma in his young life — his father was incarcerated and his mother had been in a car accident where the children witnessed her suffering from extreme facial injuries. Over the course of 1 1/2 years, M had been in 5 different foster homes.

M was enrolled in our full-day preschool while his mother was hoping to gain some stability. M had many challenges controlling his emotions and couldn't stand it when anyone touched him. We realized he needed additional support and partnered with Howard Center to provide a behavior interventionist. Over just a few weeks, M's negative behaviors began to diminish. He developed close bonds with teachers and peers, and began asking for and giving hugs. He evolved from an angry, defiant child into a loving, caring boy. His mother worked tirelessly at improving her parenting skills and was recently approved for housing assistance. M's sister is now enrolled in the Y program. The network of support that we have been able to give this family has improved their circumstances immensely.

When K first joined the Y's part-time preschool program, he lived with his young father. His mother was incarcerated, so he rarely saw her.

K's grandparents did their best to help out by providing some financial support, but being elderly and retired, they had limited resources. Because they saw the positive impact of the Y program on K, they requested full-day care for him. They also felt this would give his father the opportunity to pull his life together and find consistent work. However, they struggled with how to pay for full-time care.

With support from the Y, K was enrolled in a full-time program and was able to benefit from the resulting structure and consistency, while having access to both support services and a high-quality early education.

In particular, K's social and emotional skills showed significant growth. He made lasting friendships with peers and developed strong, trusting relationships with adults. He also developed the ability to manage feelings and respond to emotional cues appropriately. This growth had a significant impact in his ability to make a smooth transition into kindergarten.

T is a single mother who, until recently, was homeless. After spending several months with the uncertainty of where she would be living, she was able to find an affordable apartment. Full-time care for her daughter C was essential so that T could continue to work and pay her bills.

T struggled to make ends meet on her waitress's income. The difference between the state subsidy amount and the Y's tuition would jeopardize her ability to pay other bills and, ultimately, she feared that she could end up homeless again.

Given the economic stress and uncertainty that T was facing, the Y knew we could make a difference in her and C's lives. We covered the full co-pay (the difference between her subsidy payment and our tuition) so that C could benefit from the structure and consistency of our program, while having access to high-quality early education, which we knew was so important, particularly in the crucial year before she started kindergarten.

And, lastly, from a school employee:

The Y After-School Program has made an amazing impact on our school and the families involved. One particular sixth grader who required a one-on-one during the school day because of bad behavior and poor grades was also suffering with a home life that had absent parents who set no boundaries. He was introduced to the Y program and immediately we saw improvement in his school day. He no longer requires a one-on-one and his grades have risen. He walks in the halls with confidence, replacing his scowl with a look of contentment.

There are brothers and sisters who come together to the after-school program because their home life is in disarray; parental illness and mental health concerns are heavy burdens at home. Staying at school has made a tremendous impact on their lives. They are given the chance to play, be happy and safe and enjoy the moments of childhood.