



Testimony to the Senate Appropriations Committee on Child Care Referral Services

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The Family Center of Washington County is one of 16 statewide Parent Child Centers, which provide a variety of core services and supports to foster the positive growth and development of children and families.

The Family Center of Washington County is also one of 12 statewide VACCRRRA member agencies. VACCRRRA is a statewide affiliate association of agencies that provide child care support services in communities throughout Vermont, including child care referral, professional development and training for child care providers and the Child Care Financial Assistance Program.

The Governor's Recommended Budget regarding child care referral services included a significant change to our current service delivery model.

- The budget proposed to centralize the referral services in the 211 system.
- \$479,000 currently allocated to local agencies would have been cut.
- \$279,000 would have been used to set up the centralized service, for a savings of \$200,000.

The VACCRRRA member agencies developed an alternative proposal which continues child care referral services locally and also offers significant savings for the budget.

We believe strongly that providing these services in a community-based setting is critical to their success. Locally-based child care referral services are:

- Aligned with the 12 AHS districts.
- Universally provided to families, including but not limited to 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.

VACCRRRA has completed an analysis of child care referral service cost and service demand, and used that analysis to develop an alternative proposal. What we proposed:

- Revising the payment formula for referrals and restructuring the payment rates to make them more consistent around the state, and reducing the overall payments by \$150,000
- Maintaining local child care referral services and incorporating program enhancements, such as establishing a single state-wide phone number to make accessing the system easier and more reliable for all customers.

After considering our proposal, the Administration agreed to drop their centralization plan but continued to press for the \$200,000 in savings. The House Appropriations Committee considered the issue and elected to support our proposal for \$150,000 in savings. It is that proposal that was included in the budget approved by the full House that you are now considering.

We hope that you will support the proposal in the House budget. The VACCRRRA agencies worked hard in a collaborative way to re-examine how we are working with the state in order to come up with our proposal. *Member agencies engaged in a proactive process that included a close examination of costs per call statewide and regional demographic and referral call data. Through many thoughtful and deliberative meetings and discussions, there was a unanimous decision made to take funding cuts in order to keep the service local in our communities. This decision to absorb cuts was guided by the belief that keeping child care referral services local was vital to maintaining high quality service delivery for families and service providers across Vermont.*

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

Attachment: [Child Care Referral Service Supporting Data and Information](#)



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?