

Testimony before the Vermont House and Senate Committees  
on Appropriations, St. Johnsbury School, February 15, 2016

Hello, my name is Jim Flint. I live in Craftsbury and serve as the executive director of Wonder & Wisdom, a community nonprofit based in Greensboro. Our organization provides afterschool and summer learning programs for rural kids from Greensboro, Greensboro Bend, Stannard, Craftsbury, and neighboring towns. Thank you for holding this budget hearing and taking public testimony.

In testifying today, I bring two requests: First, that the legislature support the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) Special Fund with an appropriation of \$2.5 million, and second, that funding levels for the childcare family assistance program be increased. These two measures will help low income families access quality childcare, including afterschool programs and summer learning. More than 50% of the children who attend our afterschool program in Greensboro are in a tenuous low income situation. Without childcare subsidies, families in poverty could not afford the basic program fees. Without children, our afterschool program would cease.

88% of Vermont families support public funding for afterschool and summer learning. Yet in many cases, the cost for small rural school districts and struggling nonprofits to offer quality programming is prohibitive, especially when serving children and families living in poverty. Public funding support is vital.

Providing safe and nurturing places for children to continue learning, while parents finish their work days, is essential to Vermont's economy and the health of small and large communities. In addition, children and youth who are actively involved with afterschool and summer learning programs receive healthy snacks and meals, participate in fun physical activities, and engage hands-on in STEM topics.

I greatly appreciate the legislature's support for education initiatives that happen during and beyond school hours. I urge the Governor and the Appropriations committees to allocate FY17 funds to the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund, and to increase childcare subsidy levels. These measures will help service providers meet the afterschool and summer needs of Vermont kids, especially children from our highest need families.

Thank you,

Jim Flint, Executive Director

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The recent possibility of the Child Care Financial Assistance Program not receiving the much needed increase in FY 17 of 1.5 million dollars creates a real threat to our children where parents are so dependent on the subsidy.

The cost of running a child care center is much more than I think is understood. The cost of good employees is hard enough when considering compensation for qualifications and experience let alone setting a livable wage – which we try to do. The cost of Federal and State Taxes; Unemployment Insurance; Workers Comp Insurance; and the more recent penalty for Medical Insurance costs my business an additional \$7500 every two weeks – this is on top of the wages I pay. And, because of the current economy, I have not raised my co-pay rate in a very long time.

For the Financial Assistance Program to be level funded will mean an actual reduction in benefits. The costs just continue escalate; the need grows stronger in a faltering economy; and we will be hurting the kids who need it the most. Right now it is only my Star status that and some additional grant funding that allows me to keep the center open. I do hope you all consider a serious increase to the funding for Child Care Assistance. It is where our kids get their start – especially those kids who live below the poverty line.

The threat of a waitlist for the first time in Vermont's history if in fact the increase does not happen,, will also be detrimental to families in need and the centers that serve them. NH subsidy right now has an automatic 30 day wait for families applying for and qualifying for subsidy. In Wells River NBCCC III borders the NH State line. We have lost families because they do not have the funds to front the cost while waiting for subsidy, and we do not have the funds to care for these children without compensation. Again, please reconsider this increase and figure out a way to pull together to support our future, through the child care needs of our most vulnerable.