

Overview of the Vermont Child Poverty Council's 2015 Annual Progress Report

- The Vermont Child Poverty Council (Council) was established in 2007 “to examine child poverty in Vermont and to make recommendations to the Governor and General Assembly on methods of improving the financial stability and well-being of children.”
- The Council is composed of 15 members, six of whom are legislators.
- The Council met five times during the summer & fall of 2015 and discussed topics such as prekindergarten education, driver’s license restoration, workforce development, and the impact of incarceration on families.
- The Council made 3 recommendations as a whole and its four subcommittees each made several recommendations.

- Council Recommendations:

- *Encourage the committees of jurisdiction to take testimony on the importance of afterschool programming in mitigating the achievement gap between students from low- and high-income families.*

Data indicate that students who do not participate in enrichment activities outside core school hours fall behind their peers in terms of academic achievement. Affluent students more readily have access to learning opportunities outside the classroom, whereas students from low-income families without the same types of opportunities suffer by comparison academically.

The Council further requests that the General Assembly as a whole provide funding to the Expanded Learning Opportunity Special Fund to expand afterschool programs in all communities, and particularly those with a high percentage of students from low-income families.

- *Require all Vermont agencies and recipients of State funds to share responsibility for addressing child poverty and for improving the financial stability and well-being of Vermont’s children.*

The Council would like to challenge all State departments to hold themselves accountable for funding antipoverty efforts and to work together across agencies to coordinate relevant budgets and policies.

- *Encourage the General Assembly to continue the work it began last year on establishing dental therapists and requiring employee-earned sick leave by passing S.20 and H.187, respectively.*

○ Subcommittee Recommendations:

▪ Subcommittee on Housing and Homelessness

- *The General Assembly should take up and pass H.211, An act relating to establishing a homeless bill of rights and prohibiting discrimination against people without homes.*
- *The General Assembly should support an increase in the funds available to help pay overdue rent owed by individuals at risk of becoming homeless through eviction.*
- *Adopt the following recommendations proposed by the Governor's Council on Pathways from Poverty:*
 - *fully funding the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board;*
 - *transitioning funding from temporary housing in motels to community-based solutions;*
 - *creating incentives for private, for-profit landlords to bring substandard or vacant rental housing up to code and back into the rental housing market; and*
 - *implementing a \$2.00 occupancy fee on lodging, that can be used to support affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs.*

▪ Subcommittee on Education

- *The Council encourages the Administration to ensure that Vermont Universal Children's Higher Education Savings Account Program has a strong start.*
- *The General Assembly should work with the Agency of Education to support proven strategies such as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT), and Restorative Justice in providing structures and professional development that reduce and prevent behavior incidents. The Council also recommends certain initiatives to track school discipline and reduce instances of school exclusion.*
- *The Council encourages the committees of jurisdiction to review the forthcoming report from AoE and AHS on the ways in which schools and external partners may coordinate services and resources and pursue any recommendations aimed at better integrating education and social services for students and families in schools.*

▪ Subcommittee on Economic Security and Empowerment

- *The Subcommittee recommends that barriers to employment be eliminated with safe, affordable child care and transportation options, such as increasing*

investments in Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program, funding a large-scale study on transportation, and implementing a uniform driver restoration policy.

- *The Subcommittee encourages the General Assembly to stabilize and foster economic security for families on Reach Up by increasing grants and restoring FY16 budget reduction of \$125.00.*
 - *The Subcommittee recommends that the General Assembly focus on the following economic opportunities:*
 - *Increasing investments to Micro Business and Individual Development Accounts, creating a matched savings program, and providing funding for financial coaching, credit repair, and banking program initiatives.*
 - *Expanding the earned income tax credit, reducing/eliminating benefit cliffs, increasing income disregards and asset limits.*
 - *Support passage of H.187, An act relating to absence from work for health care and safety.*
 - *The Subcommittee recommends that the General Assembly maintain and increase State dollars in energy assistance by increasing LIHEAP, fully funding crisis fuel assistance and removing the one grant restriction, and increasing investment in the Low Income Weatherization Assistance Program.*
- Subcommittee on Health and Nutrition
- *The General Assembly should preserve the 10% State match it earmarked in Act 26, An act relating to capital construction and State bonding, for the Agency of Human Services' integrated eligibility system, which will streamline the process for obtaining benefits across programs and help consumers identify the benefits for which they are eligible. The new IT system will enable schools to data match more easily with the DCF for the purpose of calculating eligibility and reimbursements under the universal school meal program.*
 - *Support passage of S.20, An act relating to establishing and regulating dental therapists, and H.187, An act relating to absence from work for health care and safety.*