

2017 Recommendations of the Vermont Child Poverty Council

Report Recommendation	Legislative Action?
<p>Committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony and craft legislative solutions to address the lack of accessibility and affordability in Vermont’s child care system, including the appropriate allocation of child care subsidy funds.</p>	<p>Committees of jurisdiction heard testimony on a range of topics related to Vermont’s child care system, including Children’s Integrated Services (CIS), the STep Ahead Recognition System (STARS), Northern Lights Career Development Center, early brain development, the Strengthening Families Framework, and Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) reimbursement rates.</p> <p>S.40, an act relating to increasing the minimum wage, was vetoed by the Governor. Enactment of S.40 would have required the Commissioner for Children and Families to amend the federal Child Care and Development Fund State Plan to adjust the benefits and market rate for the Child Care Financial Assistance Program in relation to increases in the minimum wage.</p> <p>Sp. Sess. 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 11, Sec. C.105.1(9) requires DCF to survey parents of young children regarding early care and education needs. It additionally contains the following language re: child care funding allocation in § E.318.2(a):</p> <p>(a) Of the funds appropriated in Sec. B.318 of this act:</p> <p>(1) \$247,388 may be used to fill 3 limited service licensing staff positions; and</p> <p>(2) a minimum of \$2,451,000 shall be used to increase the infant and toddler rate used in the Child Care Financial Assistance Program. In the event there is no statutorily required increase in the minimum wage on January 1, 2019, the funds allocated in Sec. E.318.1(a) of this act shall also be used to increase the infant and toddler rate.</p>

<p>The Department for Children and Families is encouraged to work collaboratively with other State agencies and public and private partners to foster opportunities in which the child care workforce can both grow and enhance its quality of care and the number of high quality (i.e. 4 and 5 STAR) programs can also grow.</p>	<p>[See list of child care related testimony above, including reference to § E.318.2(a)(1)]</p> <p>While there has been an increase in the number of high quality child care programs, there is ongoing concern regarding overall system capacity. To that end, DCF is working with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development to build system capacity.</p>
<p>The Council requests that the General Assembly provide funding to the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs, particularly in underserved areas of the State and in communities with a high percentage of students from families with low income. In support of this request, the committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony on the importance of afterschool and summer programming, specifically in terms of mitigating the achievement gap and in supporting positive youth development, workforce skills, and prevention behaviors.</p>	<p>Vermont After School, Inc. provided testimony on January 11, 2018 to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare on the importance of afterschool and summer learning opportunities in relation to what became Act 204.</p> <p>The House Committee on Appropriations heard testimony on Expanded Learning Opportunities from Vermont Afterschool, Inc. on February 14, 2018.</p> <p>The Expanded Learning Opportunities request was not ultimately funded, however, there are a few child care studies in the budget (Sp. Sess. 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 11) that may address afterschool and summer learning needs (see Sec. C.105.1(9) requiring DCF to survey parents of young children regarding early care and education needs; Sec. E.318.3 requiring JFO to conduct a child care and Pre-K capacity baseline report; and Sec. E.500.7 requiring the Agency of Education to commission an independent study to recommend how to more effectively provide Pre-K education.)</p>

<p>Committees of jurisdiction should monitor and evaluate the implementation of Act 166, an act relating to providing access to publicly funded prekindergarten education, with a specific focus on:</p> <p>(a) a review of the Agencies of Education and of Human Services' report regarding reforming Act 166;¹</p> <p>(b) the coordination and integration of prekindergarten programs serving publicly funded prekindergarten students, including Head Start programs to ensure the socioeconomic integration and blending of federal and State education funding resources for families with low income;</p> <p>(c) access to and utilization of early education programming, including for children who stand to benefit most from prekindergarten opportunities; and</p> <p>(d) possible implications of the ten-hour service model for families that cannot afford additional early childhood services.</p>	<p>Pre-K was a significant topic for the House and Senate Education Committees and House Committee on Human Services this session, but did not yield any statutory changes.</p> <p>The House Committees on Education and on Human Services held a joint hearing on January 3, 2018 pertaining to the reform of Act 166. The Senate Education Committee also heard the same testimony on January 3, 2018.</p> <p>Ultimately, the Senate passed S.257, an act relating to miscellaneous changes to education law, containing provisions addressing Pre-K. The House proposed various amendments. The bill addressed whether the Secretary of Education or school districts would pay vouchers to private providers and public schools, requirements for program safety and quality, etc. S.257 did not successfully emerge from conference committee.</p> <p>[See reference to Sp. Sess. 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 11, Secs. E.318.3 and E.500.7 regarding forthcoming studies on Pre-K.]</p>
<p>The committees of jurisdiction should consider capital expenditures to reduce the shortage of affordable housing units in the State and should also examine how the \$35 million housing bond is being distributed and whether it is effectively addressing homelessness.</p>	<p>Sp. Sess. 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 11 level funds the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in fiscal year 2019.</p>

¹ Recommended Reform of Act 166 Report, Agencies and Education and Human Services, *available at:* <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/edu-legislative-report-act166-recommended-reform-from-aoe-ahs.pdf>.

<p>Pursuant to the recommendations in the Roadmap to End Homelessness Report,² the committees of jurisdiction should consider enhancing supportive services, rental subsidies, and rapid re-housing initiatives, such as increasing funds available to help pay overdue rent owed by individuals at risk of becoming homeless through eviction.</p>	<p>Sp. Sess. 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 11 level funds rental subsidies and appropriates funding to address homelessness.</p> <p>Act 188 addresses rental housing health and safety and establishes a Rental Housing Advisory Board.</p> <p>Act 149 provides the State more resources to address and educate about the dangers lead exposure in young children.</p>
<p>The Council supports the recommendation of the former Governor’s Council on Pathways from Poverty to repeal the Reach Up benefit reduction for families with a member receiving disability benefits.³ The committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony on the impacts this benefit reduction is having on affected families. The Council further recommends that the committees of jurisdiction consider increasing the Reach Up ratable reduction to better align with the basic needs budget.</p>	<p>Act 109 makes four changes to Vermont’s Reach Up program. First, in determining eligibility for the Reach Up program, it excludes the equity value of an operable motor vehicle for any child of driving age who needs a vehicle to attend school or work. Second, it removes the requirement that a Reach Up program director or designee conduct 18- and 36-month reviews with participating families. Third, it amends the work requirements for participating families to better align with federal work requirements. Fourth, the act expands the education deferment up to 18 months for participants over 20 years of age who are engaged in 15 hours of classes a week related to attaining a high school diploma, GED, or completion of a literacy program.</p> <p>Sp. Sess. 2018 Acts and Resolves No. 11 requires that the Reach Up ratable reduction calculation be based on the current year versus a historical point-in-time calculation that had previously been used.</p>

² Roadmap to End Homelessness Report, *available at*: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/WorkGroups/House%20General/Housing/Homelessness/Roadmap%20to%20End%20Homelessness/W~Larry%20Oaks~Roadmap%20to%20End%20Homelessness%20-%20Final%20Report~1-10-2017.pdf>.

³ The November 2015 report of the Council on Pathways from Poverty is *available at*: <http://governor.vermont.gov/sites/shumlin/files/documents/2016%20Poverty%20Council%20report%20FINAL.pdf>.

<p>The Council recommends that the Agencies of Human Services and of Education, in consultation with private and public partners, increase coordination of efforts to employ a two-generational model to address family trauma and to mitigate the impact of ACEs.</p>	<p>Act 204, an act relating to ensuring a coordinated public health approach to addressing childhood adversity and promoting resilience, establishes a Director of Trauma Prevention and Resilience Development within the Office of the Secretary of Human Services. The Director’s responsibility includes coordination with the Agency of Education.</p> <p>Act 204 also contains a section requiring submission of a report by AHS identifying opportunities to streamline and better coordinate the provision of services provided pursuant to 1988 Acts and Resolves No. 264.</p> <p>[Pursuant to 2017 Acts and Resolves No. 43, Sec. 4, the Agency of Human Services is required to submit a childhood adversity response plan by January 2019.]</p>
<p>The Council encourages the committees of jurisdiction to consider what more can be done to encourage families with low income to take advantage of substance use and mental health services offered in schools or the community. It further encourages the committees of jurisdiction to consider the feasibility of co-locating mental health and substance use disorder services within primary care practices for the purpose of increasing access to services.</p>	<p>Act 204 encourages greater coordination among providers and State agencies addressing childhood trauma. The Director of Trauma Prevention and Resilience Development is specifically responsible for evaluating “strategies for linking pediatric primary care with the parent-child center network and other social services.”</p>
<p>The committees of jurisdiction should maintain the increase in funding for the Micro Business Development Program in fiscal year 2019, support investments in asset building and financial literacy, and craft policies to move families with low income away from benefit cliffs and toward a consistent path for success.</p>	<p>2018 Sp. Sess. Acts and Resolves No. 11, Sec. C.105.1(11) appropriates \$100,000 for the Micro Business Development Program and also funds individual development accounts, which have a financial literacy component.</p>