



## **CHAMPLAIN VALLEY HEAD START**

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To: Members of the Vermont House and Senate Appropriations Committees

From: Patti Smith, Special Needs Coordinator, CVHS

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As a partner in providing early childhood services to children and families in Vermont, I am writing to provide information regarding the critical work of the CIS Early Intervention teams that are responsible for providing services to infants and toddlers (birth-age 3) with developmental delays and diagnosed disabilities, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

In my role as Special Needs Coordinator, I have been involved in statewide efforts to promote regular developmental screenings to identify children with potential delays and make appropriate referrals to CIS EI (for children birth-3) and the local school districts (for children ages 3-5). Research has shown that outcomes for children improve when delays are found early and needed services are put in place. I believe that we, in Vermont, have made great strides in strengthening our screening and referral practices.

Of course, as our communities become better at identifying developmental delays and making the appropriate referrals, this increases the number of children requiring evaluations and intervention services. I understand you are receiving information from other sources about the increased numbers of children served by CIS programs, at a time when there has been flat funding and a shortage of service providers. What I would like to note is the impact that the current situation is having on young children with diagnosed disabilities. When a child is experiencing a significant delay, such as autism, families often need extensive education and support to understand their child's needs and the recommended intervention program for the child is oftentimes intensive. Receiving these services is so important in helping families know how best to help their children, and helping children to make progress. CIS providers also partner with the other adults in a child's life, such as Head Start or other preschool programs, to provide guidance and information to improve our ability to meet the needs of young children with disabilities.

Our CIS providers are required by regulation to respond to all referrals and provide evaluations in a timely way. Although these dedicated professionals are doing their best, they are spread very thin meeting these mandates and as a result do not have adequate time to provide the on-going services for children at the level that would be most beneficial. ***While early identification is an important first step, in order for the child to make the gains we all want to see it is the provision of solid intervention services, as early as possible, that makes the difference.***

As an advocate for young children with disabilities, I have been glad to see our state leaders and representatives focus on the early years, and I appreciate the effort that has gone into strengthening all aspects of our systems for young children. The CIS EI teams are a critical link in these systems. The services they provide lead to better outcomes for children and, oftentimes, reduce the need for special education intervention in later years.

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