



Pam McCarthy, Vermont Family Network
Testimony on Governor's Recommended Budget
Senate and House Appropriations' Public Hearing, St. Albans City School, 2-12-18

Good evening. Thank you for holding these public hearings about the Governor's proposed FY19 Budget. My name is Pam McCarthy, and I am a resident of St. Albans Town, a parent of 4 and a grandparent of 5. My experience as a parent and community member brings me here tonight, as well as my professional role as the President and CEO of Vermont Family Network, a statewide organization that empowers and supports families of children with disabilities and special health care needs.

As one who has been involved in prevention and early intervention for over 30 years, and CEO of the agency contracted by the state to provide Children's Integrated Services Early Intervention (CIS-EI) in Chittenden County, I was dismayed to hear that there is a proposal to cut \$1.3 million from Children's Integrated Services. At a time when the needs of our youngest learners are increasing, often due to the impacts of poverty, substance abuse, trauma, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), it seems counterintuitive to make cuts to services and supports that can make a huge difference, particularly when we are also seeking to reduce the costs of special education in our schools.

While the Department for Children and Families contends that this cut is due to overbudgeting and will not impact children and families, I disagree. CIS has been level funded for 10 years, caseloads are increasing in number and complexity in many regions, and CIS providers are struggling to provide high quality, consistent services that achieve the outcomes we say we want for Vermont's young children and their families.

The \$1.3M issue is really one of underutilization due to a lack of providers, particularly the specialty providers: speech-language pathologists (SLP), occupational therapists (OT), physical therapists (PT), developmental educators (DE), applied behavior analysis (ABA) providers, etc. Sometimes this provider shortage is due to less than desirable reimbursement rates and lack of reimbursement for mileage, sometimes because specialty providers just don't exist in a region, or because they cannot meet the caseload demands, as is the case in Chittenden County. Very young children, for whom time is of the essence, are waiting for services to which they are entitled timely by law under Children's Integrated Services in accordance with Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) Medicaid..

- In April of 2017, CIS-EI in Chittenden County had 27 children waiting for SLP services, average wait time 3-6 months. 94 children were not receiving the frequency of developmental education recommended in their evaluations. This was due to an increase in referrals (40% over the past 5 years), new requirements to conduct more evaluations, and 3 staff vacancies.

- In April of 2017, CIS-EI in Franklin/Grand Isle had 34 children waiting for OT. There has been no OT providing home-based services in this community since 2015. 12 children were not getting the recommended PT, and 20 children were not getting the recommended SLP services.
- For young children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), clinically and developmentally appropriate services are lacking---in Chittenden County alone, 28 young children were diagnosed with ASD, only 4 of whom benefited from any length of time in appropriately intensive services. Earlier intervention and support of the right kind, at the right time, in the right amount, for the right duration for children with this diagnosis has been shown to make an appreciable difference.
- In both Chittenden and Franklin/Grand Isle, CIS has been forced to provide less than a “therapeutic dose,” due to constraints of capacity in many of the integrated services.

These are just a few illustrations of the need for increased support for CIS, and why I oppose the proposed reductions in funding

I urge you to consider equitably reinvesting this \$1.3M into the Children’s Integrated Services bundle in the 12 CIS regions. It would be a good start to addressing the community-identified needs of our most vulnerable children and their families, and meeting our IDEA and EPSDT obligations as a state. If there is any ability to increase Vermont’s investment in prevention and early intervention under CIS, it should be exercised, given our stated commitments to realizing the promise of *every* Vermont child.

Thank you for your time, and feel free to contact me if you need further information.

All my best,



Pam McCarthy
President/CEO
Vermont Family Network