

V E R M O N T

EARLY CHILDHOOD ALLIANCE

My name is Matt Levin, and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont Early Childhood Alliance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the subject of the \$1 million budget reduction to Children's Integrated Services (CIS) proposed by the Administration for the FFY'18 Budget Adjustment.

The bottom line of my testimony is that there are unmet needs in the CIS system that could easily spend the \$1 million of unspent funds and so this funding should not be eliminated from the FY'19 budget, and if possible not from the FY'18 budget either.

The characterization of this \$1 million as over-budgeted misses the fact that the reason why the administration hasn't spent this money is because staffing levels, vacancies, and other logistical barriers prohibit them from serving the population fast enough. There is demand. There are wait lists.

As a recent state report to the federal government stated:

The most common causes related to non-compliance of timely initiation of services were attributable to provider unavailability, including speech-language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists, early interventionists and teachers of the visually-impaired.

Along with this, Vermont, like many other states, experiences high turnover of professionals in the early childhood field. As part of our State Systemic Improvement Plan, Vermont is seeking to identify and address recruitment and retention issues in the field.

Rather than write a formal response to the proposed reduction, which we only found out the details of yesterday morning, I will offer you a sampling of some of the responses I have gotten from CIS providers around the state when they learned about the Administration's proposal. In most cases I have identified only the region they serve. I believe these comments speak for themselves.

Chittenden

There is no way that not billing the full amount of money available is due to minimal need. The need in most if not all these categories far surpasses the available resources. It has been difficult for the state to find contractors to provide transportation for children receiving Specialized Child Care CCFAP because the state pays so little money.... There is a constant waiting list in our region for eligible children to receive transportation, even though CDD has a contract with Good News Garage. The contract says they are supposed to serve children throughout Chittenden County, but they cannot afford to given the low contract amount.

Barre

Staffing instability has had a direct impact on CIS services offered in our region. We have lost 3 staff from CIS programs this reporting period. In the case of Family Support Home Visiting program, the position has been posted for over 2 months without a single qualified applicant for the position. We had to create a wait list and not able to provide timely responsive supports to vulnerable families looking for support.

Franklin

Yes, we are still without an occupational therapist at the home health agency that serves Franklin County. This means that our families have to access a rehab center in Chittenden County for OT when in the EI program [Note: CIS EI is supposed to be delivered in a “natural environment,” not in a rehab center]. This results in fewer children receiving the service or being underserved in this area. I believe it has been at least two years that we have had this OT vacancy; however, it could be closer to three years at this point. “Zero waiting lists in CIS” is a surprising quote!

Vermont Family Network (from a previous communication):

As of April 27, we have approximately 27 children waiting for speech services. The average wait time is anywhere from three to six months.

Hartford

Hartford Region has been without a transportation contract since January 2016. Despite attempts to work with Good News Garage regarding the contract, scheduling, & attempt to pilot 8 children, Good News Garage, responded with “this would take a full day and be more than 200 miles of driving each day. If the rate was flexible, GNG would be willing to re-examine.” So we have nothing!

Per our SPCC, there are 6 children who need transportation in our region (that I know of) and five children are not attending child care because they don’t have the transportation. One child can attend child care for now but transportation will be an issue in the fall. I would imagine these numbers are higher as we have not asked DCF about the public school children and we also have not been promoting this since we have no resource.

And finally, one quote from an individual CIS staffer summarizes the response:

I am saddened to hear and read that our leaders are reporting that there are no waitlists and no unmet needs and that they are not able to see an accurate picture of the day to day reality of our work. It is also discouraging to read that there are untapped funds that could be supporting much needed programming and resources.

We look forward to working collaboratively with your Committee and the Administration to develop ways to use funds available to serve all the needs of Vermont children and families.