

2/12/17

Thank you for allowing me address you this evening. My name is Heather Lytle, I am a resident of Danville, VT and a Director of a local child care center in St. Johnsbury VT.

I am here to encourage you to support the Governor's proposal to increase funding for CCFAP. I have been in the Early Child Care field for 26 years. I have taught all classrooms from infant to after school, as well as held a few different director positions. The Child Care Financial Assistance Program helps numerous families throughout the state of VT. Low-income families, have a difficult time finding affordable high quality care for their children. Even those families that are receiving assistance, still cannot afford the co-pays that they are required to make. There was a new set of rules and regulations put out by VT State Licensing Division, these rules require that teachers have a higher education than before, in order to be in the classroom. Teachers that have taken college courses in Early Childcare Education, help to ensure their classrooms and programs are up to standard with being a 'high-quality' program. With that requirement, also comes higher salaries. One way to pay for higher salaries, that these teachers deserve, are with tuition increases. Currently CCFAP, tuition reimbursement rates are based on what providers charged their families in 2008-2009, which is not even close to what we are charging now. This makes the families co-pay much higher and at times unattainable. Even families that are told their co-pay is 100% covered really isn't, because the tuition of that program is higher than the reimbursement rate is.

At this point, if the family cannot afford the co-pay, then the child gets pulled out of the high-quality program. When that happens, we may have children that are bounced from different houses, being cared for by babysitters and/or relatives and at times not having much stability for the child. I am here to tell you that stability, routine and structure make all the difference in the children's development in their early years. When children are in a high-quality program every day, they build trust and form relationships. They learn everyday from their teachers, peers and environment, so that when the time comes, they will be academically, emotionally and socially ready for kindergarten. Children that do not have that stability, have the risk of not being as ready when the challenges of the big school hits. When the CCFAP raises their rates to coincide more closely with the medium of what providers are charging the families, then many more of these kid can be given a jump start to their education, as well as have access to early interventions and other resources the family may need to be successful.

One family I worked with, included a mother and three kids. The mom was going to school and trying to get a better job to support her sons. After months of interviews she finally got hired for a full-time job with benefits. Unfortunately when all was said and done, the job made her ineligible for some of the benefits she was previously receiving, including a portion of child care assistance. She realized she could not keep this job and be able to pay her bills and put food on the table. She felt she had to quit her job and go back to working a minimum wage job, so that she and her kids could survive.

While running a high-quality child care program, we are seeing more single parents or dual income parents, making high-quality child care more important than ever. Ensuring the child care financial assistance program has more funds and a bigger budget going forward, ensures that more of our youngest members of our community are given a more productive start.

Thank you

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