



Daniela Caserta
Early Childhood Services Director
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Public Hearing Appropriations Testimony

Hello and thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Daniela Caserta and I'm the Director of Early Childhood Services at the Family Center for Washington Co. I have spent my entire career in Vermont working in Parent Child Centers and Community Based Mental Health, and I am here to support the Parent Child Centers' request **to increase their Master Grant funding by \$8 million.**

In addition to being a staff member of the regional PCC, and I'm also one of the 26 Building Flourishing Communities Master trainers in VT. I have a deep understanding of the effects of early trauma on a developing brain and the long-term negative outcomes of toxic stress, not only for the individual, but for the community as well.

I also deeply understand how effective PCC's are in working with families and young children to reduce the negative outcomes of Adverse Childhood Experiences.

Vermont's PCC's are designed by legislation, to offer critical whole population services that support all children and families to thrive. We provide the much-needed **Upstream** services that every family needs for optimal functioning. PCC's are community based, meet parents where they are and offer concrete support in times of need. We work with all families to develop resiliency, gain parenting knowledge, become competent in their social/emotional skills, and develop meaningful social connections with others.

However, even though we provide essential state services to families with young children, PCC staff wages and benefits are continually 30% below market rates to comparable positions in education and state government. This disparity must be addressed by increased funding to the Master grant if PCC's are expected to continue to provide high quality state services with highly skilled professionals.

I work at a PCC because I believe in prevention services. I believe in creating flourishing communities so that all Vermonters can thrive. I'm certain that PCC's are the first line of defense for families struggling with toxic stress, and I am certain that toxic stress is one of the leading causes of our inflated health care costs, rate of incarceration and poor academic success. It is vital that we adequately fund the programs that work. PCC are on the front line of what is working well in this state.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my testimony.