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FY'19 Testimony CIS Funding

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Claire Kendall, Co Executive Director at the Family Center of Washington County. The Family Center is a member of the Parent Child Center Network. Parent Child Centers are a network of 15 community-based non-profit organizations, serving all of Vermont. The focus of each PCC is to provide support and education to families with young children. The goal is to help all Vermont families get off to a healthy start, promote well-being, and build on family strengths.

CIS, a signature early childhood initiative in Vermont, maximizes children's health, development, and learning by providing individualized support to families and specialized child care programs. CIS was designed to lessen, if not eliminate, the need for future services that are costlier and less efficient.

However, since CIS began in 2009, **it has been both underfunded and funding has remained flat**, while we have seen and increased demand in services.

There is an urgent need for \$1 million to be allocated into the CIS bundle. The \$1 million dollar cut to the base is proposed to the CIS Budget, but from a community agency perspective, **we absolutely cannot afford a \$1 million dollar cut to the CIS base. The CIS services within the bundle are underfunded.**

We cannot keep pace with referrals. There is unmet need and waitlists for some services- Early Intervention is prevented from keeping a waitlist due to federal special education rules, but due to an ever increasingly high number of referrals, and no funding increases over the last 9 years, staffing levels are frozen and children are not receiving the dose of services warranted by child & family need. Timeliness of services and delays in services are product of underfunding and inadequate staffing patterns. We struggle to hire and retain master and bachelor level trained staff on lower than average salaries. CIS providers can no longer pay their staff enough to avoid high turn-over rates and long vacancies. This leads to a lack of access to services due to vacancies. CIS has staff retention survey data

that clearly highlights salary and benefits being the number one challenge facing the retention of quality staff.

This translates into reduced services for children and families at a time when research points to early investment having a high rate of return if adequate investments are made. Through increased investment in CIS, which is upstream from DCF/Family Services involvement, there is an impact on Family Services. DCF needs the support of a strong prevention/early intervention/family strengthening system in order to reduce the number of families coming into Family Services involvement. That system needs shoring up, not further erosion.

An increased investment in CIS would help Vermont come closer to the original commitment the state made to support young children and families who need these intervention services to ensure continued progress on family safety and stability; optimal, healthy child development; and families' access to quality early care and education.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and it is my hope this the committee will decide to invest the proposed \$1 million dollar cut back into CIS.

Thank you for your time today.

Claire Kendall