

## 2016 Vermont Child Poverty Council Report Recommendations

Prepared by the Office of Legislative Council

July 20, 2017

Report Recommendations	Related Legislative Action(s)
<i><u>CHILD CARE</u></i>	
Committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony and craft legislative solutions to address the lack of accessibility and affordability in Vermont's child care system. The Council encourages the committees of jurisdiction to review the report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care (BRC). The Council suggests that where it is not financially feasible to implement a particular recommendation universally, efforts instead be made to prioritize services and supports to children of families with low income.	Both Senate Health & Welfare and House Human Services Committees heard detailed testimony from the Chair of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality Affordable Childcare. The Senate Committee on Education and House Committee on Education heard testimony on Vermont's child care system and early childhood development generally.  With regard to the Child Care Financial Assistance Program, Act 29 excluded earnings deposited into a qualified child savings account for the purpose of determining continuing eligibility. <sup>1</sup>
The Departments of Labor and for Children and Families are encouraged to work collaboratively to foster opportunities in which the child care workforce can both grow and enhance its quality of care.	No known legislative action
The use and sharing of data regarding child care affordability and accessibility should be strategic to ensure that resources are utilized appropriately and that the needs of families are addressed.	No known legislative action
<i><u>EDUCATION</u></i>	
The committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to reconsider the criminal nature of truancy and the fine imposed on the parents of truant students in favor of diversion and other programs to address families' underlying needs, particularly in the context of special education.	No known legislative action

<sup>1</sup> Act 29 is available here: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT029/ACT029%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

<p>The Council requests that the General Assembly provide funding to the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund to expand access to afterschool and summer learning programs, particularly in underserved areas of the State and in communities with a high percentage of students from families with low income. In support of this request, the committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony on the importance of afterschool and summer programming, specifically in terms of mitigating the achievement gap and in supporting positive youth development, workforce skills, and prevention behaviors.</p>	<p>H.270 was introduced which proposed to create an Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELOs) Grant Program to support and encourage increased student participation in and access to ELO programs offered outside school hours and during the summer throughout Vermont.<sup>2</sup> Testimony was taken in both the House and Senate Education Committees, but the bill was not passed out of the House Education Committee.</p>
<p>Committees of jurisdiction should monitor and evaluate the implementation of Act 166, an act relating to providing access to publicly funded prekindergarten education, with a specific focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the efficacy of joint administration by the Agencies of Education and of Human Services;</li> <li>(b) the coordination and integration of prekindergarten programs serving publicly funded prekindergarten students, including Head Start programs to ensure the socioeconomic integration and blending of federal and State education funding resources for families with low income;</li> <li>(c) access to and utilization of early education programming, including for children who stand to benefit most from prekindergarten opportunities; and</li> <li>(d) possible implications of the ten-hour service model for families that cannot afford additional early childhood services.</li> </ul>	<p>H.517 was introduced by the House Committee on Education, which would (1) facilitate the ability of families to enroll a child, who is three or four years of age or is five years of age but is not yet enrolled in kindergarten, in a public prekindergarten education program or a private high-quality child development program; and (2) clearly establish the responsibility for regulatory oversight of public prekindergarten education programs and private high-quality child development programs.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>Sec. 37 of Act 49 requires, on or before November 1, 2017, that the Secretaries of Human Services and of Education jointly present recommendations to the House and Senate Committees on Education, House Committee on Human Services, and Senate Committee on Health and Welfare that will ensure equity, quality, and affordability, and reduce duplication and complexity, in the current delivery of prekindergarten services.<sup>4</sup></p>
<p>The collection and use of longitudinal data is essential for tracking the progress of Vermont’s students, and the Council looks forward to the Agency of Education’s implementation of such a system over the course of the next two years. Once the system is functional, the Council recommends that the unit of analysis be at the supervisory union or supervisory district level to reduce suppression of data from small schools.</p>	<p>No known legislative action</p>

<sup>2</sup> H.270 is available here: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/H-0270/H-0270%20As%20Introduced.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> H.517 is available here: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/BILLS/H-0517/H-0517%20As%20Introduced.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Act 49 is available here: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT049/ACT049%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

The Council recommends that the Agencies of Human Services and of Education, in consultation with private and public partners, coordinate efforts to employ a two-generational model to address family trauma and to mitigate the impact of adverse childhood experiences.	Several bills were introduced pertaining to adverse childhood experiences, H.23, H.28, H.508 and S.90. H.508 was ultimately enacted as Act 43. <sup>5</sup>
The General Assembly should encourage schools to adopt a positive disciplinary program as part of their disciplinary plan. The General Assembly should discourage schools from suspending students for a policy infraction. Additionally, the Agency of Education is encouraged to provide written public guidance to schools regarding options for providing alternative educational services when a student is expelled.	No known legislative action
The Council recommends that the committees of jurisdiction bring housing and education advocates together to work collaboratively on helping homeless teenagers succeed in school.	No known legislative action
<i>HOUSING</i>	
The Council recommends that the committees of jurisdiction review the Housing First approach practiced here in Vermont by Pathways for Housing and other organizations, in which people experiencing homelessness are offered immediate access to private-market, scatter-site housing without prerequisites for sobriety, psychiatric stability, or completion of previous treatment.	Both the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, and the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs heard testimony regarding the Housing First approach.
The Council recommends that the committees of jurisdiction review the correlation (or lack thereof) between increased minimum wage and homelessness.	No known legislative action that directly touched on this issue, however, Act 69, Sec. F.1, calls for a comprehensive analysis and report on the minimum wage and benefit cliffs, which would likely touch on the issue of changes in the minimum wage and its effect on housing subsidies and other aid. <sup>6</sup>
The committees of jurisdiction should review the impending “Roadmap to Accelerate Vermont’s Effort to End Homelessness” report to be issued in January 2017 by the Agency of Human Services and consider the recommendations.	Both the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs and the Senate Committee on Economic Development, Housing, and General Affairs heard testimony on this report.

<sup>5</sup> Act 43 is available here: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT043/ACT043%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Act 69 is available at: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT069/ACT069%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

<p>The General Assembly should support an increase in the funds available to help pay overdue rent owed by individuals at risk of becoming homeless through eviction. Assistance with up to 3 months of overdue rent is one of several forms of financial and rental assistance related to homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing that may be provided by community organizations that receive funding from the Office of Economic Opportunity’s Housing and Opportunity Grant Program.</p>	<p>No known legislative action</p>
<p>The General Assembly should work with the Governor to adopt and implement the recommendations of the Governor’s Council on Pathways from Poverty concerning housing and homelessness.<sup>7</sup> These recommendations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. fully funding the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board;</li> <li>b. transitioning funding from temporary housing in motels to community-based solutions such as the Vermont Rental Subsidy Program, the Housing and Opportunity Grant Program, Family Supportive Housing, Mental Health Vouchers, and AHS Central Office Direct Service and Service Coordination Grants;</li> <li>c. creating incentives for private, for-profit landlords to bring substandard or vacant rental housing up to code and back into the rental housing market; and</li> <li>d. implementing a \$2.00 occupancy fee on lodging, that can be used to support affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. In Act 85 (secs. I.1- I.3), the VHCB was awarded \$35m for its affordable housing bond/program as requested.<sup>8</sup></li> <li>b. At least one committee, the House Committee on General, Housing and Military Affairs, heard testimony on this issue. Sec. E.321 of Act 85 permits AHS to continue to fund housing assistance in the GA program, as well as to fund grants to establish community based alternatives for temporary housing for the purpose of reducing the number of individuals temporarily housed by the GA program.</li> <li>c. No known legislative action</li> <li>d. A \$2.00 occupancy fee was proposed in several different pieces of legislation, considered by multiple committees of jurisdiction in both bodies, but ultimately this was not adopted.</li> </ul>
<p><u>ECONOMIC SUPPORTS</u></p>	
<p>The Council supports an expansion of the Post-Secondary Education program, as well as an increase in the ratable reimbursement within Reach Up.</p>	<p>Testimony was taken on the PSE program generally, by at least one committee, the House Committee on Human Services.</p>
<p>Some potential Post-Secondary Education participants are unable to take certain college courses due to the fact they do not contain elements required by the federal TANF program. The Departments of Labor and for Children and Families are encouraged to work with Vermont colleges to build industry-certified credentials or job skill certification into the course work, which will provide PSE students with a greater variety of qualifying courses.</p>	<p>Testimony was taken on the PSE program generally, by at least one committee, the House Committee on Human Services.</p>

<sup>7</sup> The November 2015 report of the Council on Pathways from Poverty is available at <http://governor.vermont.gov/sites/governor/files/2015%20Poverty%20Council%20report%20to%20Governor%20FINAL.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Act 85 is available at: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/bill/status/2018/H.542>.

The Council suggests that economic supports within Reach Up be expanded to provide more families with transportation to their employment, medical appointments, and child care sites.	No known legislative action
The committees of jurisdiction should take testimony regarding the impediments caused by asset limits in public benefit programs.	Act 29 increased the asset limit in the Reach Up Program from \$2,000.00 to \$9,000.00 for determinations of initial and continuing eligibility. It also excluded retirement savings accounts and qualified child education savings accounts from asset limit calculations in the Reach Up Program. <sup>9</sup>
The Vermont Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) should be granted additional resources to expand its assistance to families with low income to prepare their tax filings in a manner that maximizes tax credits and deductions.	No legislative action taken
The Council supports the recommendation of the Governor’s Council on Pathways from Poverty to repeal the Reach Up benefit reduction for families with a member receiving disability benefits. <sup>10</sup> The committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony on the impacts this benefit reduction is having on affected families.	Testimony was taken on the Reach Up program generally by the House Committee on Human Services and the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare.
<u>SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH</u>	
There is a lack of information on individuals with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders due to the fact that only one code is selected at the time of service. The Council recommends that the committees of jurisdiction work with the Departments of Health and of Mental Health to generate better data for analysis.	No known legislative action
The Council encourages the committees of jurisdiction to consider what more can be done to encourage families with low income to take advantage of substance use and mental health services offered in schools or the community.	No known legislative action
The Council supports the development of initiatives to better train youth mental health clinicians in identifying, intervening, and treating co-occurrences of mental illness and substance use.	Although not specific to clinicians serving youth, Act 82 (sec. 9) created the Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Use Disorder Workforce Study Committee to (among other things) examine best practices for training health care and service providers who work with individuals with mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse. <sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See note 1.

<sup>10</sup> See *id.*

<sup>11</sup> Act 82 is available at: <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2018/Docs/ACTS/ACT082/ACT082%20As%20Enacted.pdf>.

<p>The Departments of Health and of Mental Health should coordinate with community partners better to support youth with mental health challenges and other disabilities with regard to learning, mentoring, and internship opportunities.</p>	<p>No known legislative action</p>
<p>The Council supports the appropriation of additional funds to the designated agencies for the purpose of expanding service delivery and ensuring timely access to cost-effective, evidence-based treatments.</p>	<p>Act 85 (secs. E. 314.1-E.314.2) appropriates funds to increase wages (or offset increases) to certain DA/SSA employees in FY18, but not specifically for “expanding service delivery and ensuring timely access to cost-effective, evidence-based treatments.”<sup>12</sup></p>
<p><i><u>ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITY</u></i></p>	
<p>The enabling statute for Vermont’s Universal Children’s Higher Education Savings Program is not flexible enough to allow a pilot program impacting only children of families with low income. The Council supports an amendment to the statute that would enable a portion of Vermont’s children to participate in the program.</p>	<p>No known legislative action</p>
<p>The committees of jurisdiction should consider reallocating financial resources from job creation to microbusiness development while concurrently crafting policy to bring the underground economy aboveground as a means of moving families with low income away from benefit cliffs and toward a path for success.</p>	<p>No known legislative action that would “bring the underground economy aboveground” other than perhaps marijuana legislation. Act 69 (sec. L.1), includes a statement of purpose and intent to include additional funding for microbusiness development.<sup>13</sup> Act 85 (sec. C.100(1)) includes a one-time appropriation for microbusiness development programs of \$100,000.00.<sup>14</sup></p>
<p>The Department of Labor should work to streamline pathways for individuals with low income to move into higher paying jobs through educational opportunities and technical career-specific training.</p>	<p>There were no legislative proposals as specific as this rec, but several sections of Act 69 address the DOL workforce training system &amp; career educational opportunities, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Sec. E.1 (calls for a holistic review of the entire workforce development system);</li> <li>•Sec. E.3 (authorizes the position of Career Pathways Coordinator within the Agency of Education);</li> <li>•Sec. E.4 (creates a heating fuel and service workforce training pilot project); and</li> <li>•Sec. F.1 (calls for a minimum wage and benefits cliff study).<sup>15</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup> See note 8.

<sup>13</sup> See note 6.

<sup>14</sup> See note 8.

<sup>15</sup> See note 6.

<p>State agencies and departments depositing funds into local banks are encouraged to utilize opportunities, such as the opening of new accounts, to negotiate for terms favorable to Vermonters with low income. For example, agencies and departments may consider negotiating for financial literacy materials prepared by the banking institution or free checking accounts for residents under a certain income threshold.</p>	<p>No known legislative action</p>
<p>The Office of the Treasurer is engaged in a number of initiatives to provide Vermonters of all ages with greater financial knowledge and skills. The General Assembly should continue to support these efforts.</p>	<p>No known legislative action  (Note: The Vermont Financial Literacy Commission is slated to be repealed as of July 1, 2018 and to date no known legislative action has been taken to extend or repeal this sunset.)</p>
<p>The committees of jurisdiction should review and consider amending the charitable donation options on Vermont income tax return forms to broadly benefit innovative anti-poverty measures for children rather than multiple specific organizations benefiting children.</p>	<p>No known legislative action</p>