

Recommendations from 2016 Annual Child Poverty Report
 Action indicates activity during the 2017 legislative session
 Rep. Diane Lanpher

Area of recommendations:	Recommended	Action	No Action	Successful passage part/whole
Child Care	3	1	2	1
Education	7	3	4	2
Housing (3 in 2016 & 2 from 2015)	5	3	2	1
Economic Supports	6	4	2	1
Substance Abuse and Mental Health	5	2	3	2
Economic Empowerment and Financial Capability	6	3	3	2
Total	32	16	16	9
Percent of total		50%	50%	28%

A. CHILD CARE

The 2016 Council recommends the following:

1. 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. At the time that the Council discussed this topic, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care (BRC) had not yet released its report and recommendations. The Council encourages the committees of jurisdiction to review the BRC's report. As the committees of jurisdiction consider action on the BRC's recommendations, 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.

ACTION: Both Senate and House Human Services heard testimony from the Blue Ribbon Commission on Affordable Child Care. Senate and House Education heard testimony - Act 29 allows earnings in CSA to increase without impacting eligibility.

2. 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 ACTION

3. 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 ACTION

B. EDUCATION

The 2016 Council makes the following recommendations:

1. The statutory tools available to address truancy are blunt instruments that often exacerbate the struggles of families with low income without achieving the intended goal of stabilizing school attendance. 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 ACTION

2. Studies have shown that students who do not participate in enrichment activities outside core school hours are more likely to fall behind their peers in terms of academic achievement; are more likely to engage in risky or dangerous behaviors; and are less likely to continue on to college. 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. (also in 2015 recommends)

ACTION – introduction of H. 270 – create ELO (Expanded Learning Opportunities) grant program. Testimony in both House and Senate.

EDUCATION continues

3. 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:

- (a) the efficacy of joint administration by the Agencies of Education and of Human Services;
- (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;
- (c) access to and utilization of early education programming, including for children who stand to benefit most from prekindergarten opportunities; and
- (d) possible implications of the ten-hour service model for families that cannot afford additional early childhood services.

ACTION – H.517 – passed ACT49 section 37 requesting recommendation before Nov.1, 2017

4. 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.

NO ACTION

5. 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.

ACTION – H.23, H.28, H.508, S.90 – passed ACT 43. ACES reports are available now.

6. 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 ACTION

7. The Council believes that homeless teenagers can only succeed in school if their housing needs are addressed first. It recommends that the committees of jurisdiction bring housing and education advocates together to work collaboratively on this challenge.

NO ACTION

C. HOUSING

The 2016 Council made the following recommendations:

1. Housing must be addressed prior to the provision of services or to placing a person in an employment or educational setting. 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.

ACTION – House and Senate heard testimony regarding housing first approach. Also \$35m in budget for housing bonds.

Housing continued:

2. The Council recommends that the committees of jurisdiction review the correlation (or lack thereof) between increased minimum wage and homelessness. The Council did not receive sufficient information to draw a conclusion about this relationship.

NO ACTION – Maybe some discussion in the min wage and benefits cliff study underway this off session.

3. 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.

ACTION- Both House and Senate heard testimony

2015 Housing - The Council also reaffirms its support of the following 2015 recommendations made by the Council’s Subcommittee on Housing and Homelessness:

1. 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 three 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. Such assistance increases housing stability and can prevent children from becoming homeless.

NO ACTION

2. 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. These recommendations include:

- a. fully funding the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board;
- 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;
- 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
- d. implementing a \$2.00 occupancy fee on lodging, that can be used to support affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs.

Maybe ACTION within the \$35m in budget for bonding

D. ECONOMIC SUPPORTS

The 2016 Council made the following recommendations regarding these programs:

1. The use of a two-generational approach to combat poverty has proven beneficial to families. The Council supports an expansion of the Post-Secondary Education program, as well as an increase in the ratable reimbursement within Reach Up.

ACTION – Testimony only

Economic supports continued:

2. 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.

ACTION – Testimony only

3. Lack of transportation is the single greatest barrier to employment among work-eligible Vermonters. To that end, 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 ACTION

4. The committees of jurisdiction should take testimony regarding the impediments caused by asset limits in public benefit programs.

ACTION – ACT 29 increased asset limits from \$2,000 to \$9,000.

5. State and federal tax credits put financial resources directly into the hands of Vermonters with low income. 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 ACTION

6. 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. The committees of jurisdiction are encouraged to take testimony on the impacts this benefit reduction is having on affected families.

ACTION – Testimony regarding impacts.

E. SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH

The 2016 Council makes the following recommendations:

1. 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 ACTION

2. 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 ACTION

3. 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.

ACTION – Act 82 ???

Substance abuse and mental health continued:

4. 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.

NO ACTION

5. 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.

ACTION – increased wages for DA’s and SSA’s to \$14.00 a hour. Within budget – ACT 85

F. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

The 2016 Council made the following recommendations:

1. 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.

NO ACTION

2. The committees of jurisdiction should consider reallocating financial resources from job creation to microbusiness development while concurrently crafting policy to bring the underground economy above ground as a means of moving families with low income away from benefit cliffs and toward a path for success.

ACTION – within the Budget Act 85 there is \$100,000 to invest in micro businesses

3. 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.

ACTION – Act 69 training ????

4. 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.

NO ACTION

125. The Office of the Treasurer is engaged in a number of initiatives to provide Vermonters of all ages with greater financial knowledge and skills, including Reading is an Investment and the Vermont Treasury Cup Challenge. The General Assembly should continue to support these efforts.

ACTION – literacy commission continues

6. 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.

NO ACTION