

**From:** Vikki Patterson [vikkipatterson86@gmail.com]

**Sent:** Monday, February 25, 2019 5:25 PM

**To:** Theresa Utton

**Subject:** Written testimony for Feb 25 Public Hearings on House and Senate Appropriations

Dear Theresa Utton,

Please accept the following as my written testimony for the Public Hearings on the House and Senate Appropriations. I am unable to attend the public hearings in person, but would like my opinion and thoughts to be recognized.

My name is Vikki Patterson. I am life long resident of Vermont. My parents did their best to give me a happy a childhood. They were hard working farmers, and valued family and education very much. As I grew older, I became a parent, and I have since raised three young adults, whom I am very proud of. My children are now ages 18 years, 21 years, and 28 years. They are newly entering their phase of life where they are deciding their futures, where they want to work, and where they want to raise their own families. I also am a long time employee of Parent Child Centers. I have dedicated my entire working career to supporting families with young children, all the while supporting my own family. For over 20 years, I remained dedicated to the field of child and family services, because I believe in the mission. I believe in supporting families. I believe in supporting all families. I believe that families deserve to be supported from the moment they become pregnant with and expectant child, and that we do not wait until families enter a crisis to step up and offer help. No parent ever wants to feel like they have failed their children, they don't dream of all the ways they will fail their children as they anxiously await their child's birth. So who is there for the families right at the beginning? Who is there in their natural environment, to say Welcome! Congratulations on your new child! Parent Child Centers are. In the over 20 years that I have worked for Parent Child Centers, I have learned how to be extremely frugal with money. I committed my life to helping families, and in return, I went many years without health insurance. At times, I myself needed to apply for public assistance for what was then called food stamps, so that I could afford to feed my children on the limited salary I received as a Parent Child Center employee. Despite the financial struggles, I remained faithful to the work. I did so, because I believe in the work. I see the difference that Parent Child Centers make in the lives of children and families. For too long, the value of Parent Child Centers is going unrecognized. Too many times, Parent Child Centers are pushed aside for what some think must be more important or more immediate needs. And for too long, I have seen the capacity of Parent Child Centers to be the warm, welcoming place for all families with young children, diminish as every year goes by with level or cut funding from the Agency of Human Services.

I am disheartened when I see proposed cuts for Parent Child Centers. I am disheartened when I hear people with the ability to make change for families, find reasons why it is too difficult to support the network in the State of Vermont that was specically designed in the mid-80s to support all Vermont families with young children. I find it ironic when I see the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Children's Bureau issue a statement that demands the reshaping of child welfare in the United States to strengthen families through primary prevention services and supports, that the State of Vermont would even consider not increasing the base

funding of Parent Child Centers. Parent Child Centers are a critical component in the system of preventative care for young children. Too many children are entering the foster care system, and being present and visible as a support for young families, before problems arise, is essential to turning the curve for families. I believe if we truly want to see change, we need to stop being "penny wise and pound foolish". We need to assure that Parent Child Centers continue to be a strong component in the system of care for children and families, and that means we need to stop looking at cuts to Parent Child Center programs, and start prioritizing the funding to the base grants of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network, so that the work they do best in preventing adverse childhood experiences is maximized.

I want my children to raise their children, my grandchildren, in Vermont. But I want them to be able to do so with the resources and supports that should be available to them and all parents with young children, that only a Parent Child Center can provide. They deserve it. They need it. All parents deserve and need support from caring communities. Parent Child Centers are the heart of those caring communities. So, please fund the Parent Child Centers and not forget the impact of prevention on the future of all our children.

Vikki Patterson,  
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