

209 Austine Drive
Brattleboro, VT 05301



phone: 802-257-7852
facsimile: 802-258-2413
www.winstonprouty.org

February 25, 2019

RE: Public Hearings on the State Budget

FROM: Chloe Learey, Executive Director, Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development

I am writing today to express my concerns about a \$671,000 reduction in the budget for Children's Integrated Services (CIS). I understand that the "cut" is characterized as a rejection of an increase. That is hard to accept because CIS has been level funded for years while the actual costs of providing services have steadily increased. CIS is designed as a prevention and early intervention program, but we find that now we are faced with more families with severe and complex needs. Over the past five years, the number of clients receiving CIS services in the Brattleboro AHS District has increased 21%.

CIS provides critical health promotion, prevention, and early intervention services to pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children, and early care and education programs. Services support children's social, emotional and cognitive development, family unification and stability, parents' contribution to Vermont's workforce, and enhance and improve outcomes of complementary services such as DCF Family and Economic Services. In an era of concern over the per-student costs of K-12 education, CIS supports children before they reach that system, providing effective interventions for developmental issues that are costlier to address as children age.

I have heard that flat funding in the CIS budget is justified because of an "underutilization" of services. This is at least partially due to a lack of available services and professionals to provide them, not due to a lack of need. As the regional contract holder for CIS in Windham County, the Prouty Center has found it difficult to attract and retain qualified developmental educators, home visiting nurses, speech-language pathologists, occupational and physical therapists. We struggle with the general lack of specialists in this rural area, and we often find that when we are fortunate enough to hire and train providers, they are recruited away to school districts who offer higher pay, robust benefits and school-year work schedules. The result is that children and families must wait longer for their service needs to be met.

The chronic underfunding minimizes the positive upstream impact of the program which could help address issues that many families struggle with -poverty, substance abuse, trauma, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). These impacts increase the numbers of children we see in DCF-FS protective custody (in our region an increase of over 200% in six years) reinforcing the crisis around the meeting the needs of these children families and foster parents.

If funds are available either through "underutilization" or from new sources of revenue, they should be reinvested in strengthening CIS as it is one of the only statewide systems in place focused on preventing situations that lead to long-term negative impacts for young children. An increased investment in CIS would help Vermont come closer to the original commitment the state made to support the promise of every child.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.