

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: FW: Budget Hearing Testimony

From: Noelle Cleveland

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Dear Rep. Lanpher,

Thank you for participating in the budget hearing testimony tonight. The transparent and community relationship between our legislators and citizens is one of the things that makes our state exceptional.

I spoke tonight to increase access to high quality early childhood education to support the early development of Vermont's children and decrease income disparities for Vermont's families. Increasing funding to Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) has already supported 3,000 young children in accessing early childhood education. However, funding is still inadequate, and I am asking that the appropriations committee strengthen CCFAP by aligning CCFAP reimbursement rates with current rate information and to require that this adjustment happen automatically in the future.

I have completed my bachelor's and master's degree in early childhood education and have dedicated my career to early education because it is critical for human growth and development. Our learning experiences in early childhood lay the foundation for all future learning. An abundance of research (I would be happy to share!) shows that children with positive, high-quality early learning thrive in school. Oppositely, children who miss these experiences often enter kindergarten already behind. Many of them will never catch up with their peers. Increasing reimbursement rates for CCFAP supports learning far beyond early childhood.

Lack of funding for high quality early childhood education also has dramatic economic implications for Vermont families. Affluent families can afford high quality early education while low- and middle-income families cannot. That means vulnerable families have tough choices. They have to choose for their child to attend a low quality or unlicensed childcare or they have to leave the workforce. Neither option supports economic growth or child development and perpetuates poverty.

Simply by sufficiently funding CCFAP, we are helping young children reach their full potential and supporting economic vitality for Vermont's families.

Thank you,
Noelle Cleveland