



Pam McCarthy, Vermont Family Network  
Testimony on Governor's Recommended Budget  
Senate and House Appropriations' Public Hearing, St. Albans City School, 2-10-20

Good evening. Thank you for holding these public hearings about the Governor's proposed FY20 Budget. My name is Pam McCarthy, and I am a resident of St. Albans Town, a parent of 4 and a grandparent of 5. My experience as a parent and community member brings me here tonight, as well as my professional role as the President and CEO of Vermont Family Network, a statewide organization that empowers and supports families of children with disabilities and special health care needs. I am also a member of the Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights and the Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance.

As a person who has been involved in prevention and early intervention efforts for over 30 years, I am very concerned about the continuing lack of resources to support some of our state's most vulnerable children. At a time when the needs of our youngest learners are increasing, often due to the impacts of poverty, substance use disorders, trauma, and other Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), I believe it is essential to bolster early childhood services and supports that can make a huge difference, particularly when we are also seeking to reduce the costs of special education in our schools.

Tonight, I ask that you consider an increase to the Governor's Recommended Budget's proposed level funding of Children's Integrated Services (CIS). CIS has been level funded for over a decade now. Caseloads and family complexity have continued to increase, as has been acknowledged by the Department for Children and Families. Recently, as part of payment reform, the state's Child Development Division contracted with Burns and Associates to determine what the cost of Children's Integrated Services really is. What the consultants found was that the current cost of delivering services is \$634 per child served per month. Unfortunately, the Governor's recommended budget only provides a payment of \$502 per child served per month.

This amounts to a \$2.4 million dollar gap between what the Governor's budget proposes to pay, and what it costs CIS providers to deliver these essential services for eligible children from pre-birth to 6 years of age. Any available funding should be spent to meet our obligations to Vermont's young children and their families, many of whom are experiencing significant challenges that impact their very futures.

With CIS level-funded for over 10 years, the strain on the system is evident. In addition to more CIS-eligible children and increasing family complexities, recruiting and retaining excellent early childhood professionals is challenging. These factors are combining in ways that jeopardize good outcomes for some of Vermont's most vulnerable children and families. We need to reinforce the early care, health, and education system to ensure bright futures for our youngest Vermonters.

Please, invest in Vermont's families by better resourcing Children's Integrated Services. Children who have or are at risk of having developmental delays are legally entitled to high quality, consistent services under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In a competitive job market, we are really struggling to find and keep many of the professionals we need to ensure services are provided appropriately across Vermont. Early intervention is so important because development is so rapid in a child's early years. Very young children are too frequently waiting for services to which they are entitled timely by law under Children's Integrated Services in accordance with Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) Medicaid. Lost time can have long-term implications for children's growth and development, and can jeopardize the state's compliance with Part C and EPSDT mandates.

Here are a few things I'd like to highlight from my organization's recent experiences with CIS:

- For young children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), clinically and developmentally appropriate services are lacking---in Chittenden County alone, we currently have 13 young children diagnosed with ASD, and 12 who are suspected of having ASD. Some children have been waiting extensively for intensive services. I recently spoke to a mom who is rightfully frustrated and anxious over precious therapeutic time lost for her son at 19 months, fearing a long-term impact on his language and social development. She has been waiting for a speech language pathologist for 7 months, and is seeing her son's communication skills declining.
- CIS-EI in Chittenden County, which serves 1/3 of the eligible children in Vermont, has seen a 27% increase in total infants and toddlers served over the past 5 years. As of July 1's implementation of payment reform, CIS partners will be asked to serve 10% more children with an over 7% cut to the current funding.
- Families truly value Children's Integrated Services: "We are super grateful for this program. There is no way we could have gotten our child to the level she is now without help. I know having someone to ask many silly questions to, has been very helpful to my wife and I. Best resource we have had. It takes a village, right?!"

These are just a few illustrations of the need for increased support for CIS, and why I support this investment.

I urge you to increase funding for the Children's Integrated Services bundle in the 12 CIS regions from the level funding recommend of \$502 per child served per month to \$634 per child served per month, a statewide increase of \$2.4 million. It is critically important for us to address the community-identified needs of our most vulnerable children and their families, and to meet our IDEA and EPSDT obligations as a state. If there is any ability to increase Vermont's investment in prevention and early intervention under CIS, it should be exercised, given our stated commitments to realizing the promise of *every* Vermont child.

Thank you for your time, and feel free to contact me if you need further information.

All my best,



Pam McCarthy  
President/CEO  
Vermont Family Network