



February 19, 2020
Hearing on FY21 Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Margaret Atkinson, I am the Director of Development and Community Relations at the Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development in Brattleboro. Today I am representing a statewide coalition of community agencies who serve children and families to ask you consider a funding increase for Children's Integrated Services (CIS), which is level funded in the Governor's Recommended FY21 Budget.

CIS' range of health promotion, prevention, and early intervention services for pregnant and postpartum women, infants and children age 0-6, their families, and child development professionals, create both immediate and long-term benefits. In an era of concern over the per-student costs of K-12 education, CIS reaches children early, providing effective interventions for issues that are more costly to address as children age.

The best way to illustrate the impact of CIS on families is to hear from those who have had experience of it. Following are parts of a letter we received at the Prouty Center from the mother of a little boy with developmental delay:

"I want to express our gratitude for Kathy [the CIS early Interventionist]. She has changed all of our lives for the better. The growth we have seen in our son since Kathy came into our lives has been nothing short of amazing. She has helped him achieve so much in such a short time.

When "N" turned 2, I started to notice some changes in his behavior, and began to realize that he wasn't hitting milestones at the rate he once had. By the time he turned 2 ½ I was consumed with worry, staying up late at night trying to research what could possibly be going on with him."

This family was referred to CIS :

"Kathy didn't just educate our son; she educated our family and his teachers as well. The tools she has given us to communicate and work with him are invaluable. I know she truly cares about our son; never forgetting to point out every great thing about him along the way.

The way she works to educate has a ripple effect that I feel contributes to and benefits our community. I can't imagine where our lives would be had we not met her. Every time my boy looks into my eyes and tells me he loves me I am thankful. My only regret is not having met her sooner."

Many Vermont children are still waiting to meet their Kathy, or having met her, she is unable to work with them as often as needed. CIS has been level funded since 2009 which translates into a funding decrease even as more young children are in state custody, more families struggle to meet basic needs, and developmental screenings and referrals continues to expand.

Last summer, the Child Development Division (CDD) of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) paid consultants to study CIS reimbursement rates. The study showed that the current statewide rate of \$502 per client per month does not cover the actual costs of services: which is closer to \$634 per client per month.

We ask that the Legislature increase CIS funding by \$2.4 million in FY21; that amount would bring the reimbursement rate for the statewide CIS caseload to the \$634/per client per month level.

CIS allows Vermont's families to access what they need to support their children's development, while fostering collaboration by community-based agencies working to make the most of their resources. Please consider making needed investment in this proven, necessary, effective system.

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