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To: House Committee on Human Services

From: Sherry Carlson, Senior Director of Programs, Let's Grow Kids  
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## **Building Child Care Capacity in Vermont**

Thank you for inviting us to speak with you today about Let's Grow Kids' work on increasing capacity of child care in Vermont. As the Committee knows well, Vermont has a severe shortage of affordable, high-quality child care. We greatly appreciate your Committee's attention on this subject and your identification of increasing capacity as one of the key solutions to Vermont's child care crisis; we couldn't agree more.

### **Sherry Carlson – Capacity Development**

Recognizing the importance of investing in our youngest children, Let's Grow Kids is already taking action to address our state's child care challenges by supporting Vermont's early education workforce and investing financial, human, and technical resources to increase access to quality child care throughout the state. I want to share more information about one of these initiatives with you – our Make Way for Kids program.

Through Make Way for Kids, Let's Grow Kids is investing philanthropic dollars to provide direct financial and technical assistance from experienced early education leaders to early care and learning programs to help them increase their program capacity and quality. In its first year (2018), Make Way for Kids invested approximately \$450,000 in grants plus significant staff resources in projects that resulted in the creation of 260 new child care and early learning slots and helped programs increase the quality of 243 additional slots over the course of approximately 8 months in 12 Vermont counties. The work funded through 2018 grants is still ongoing, and we expect that an additional 200 new slots will be created and that programs will be able to increase the quality of 320 additional slots as a result of the investments that were made last year.

We are still finalizing our grant and technical assistance awards for this year (2019), but we anticipate granting about \$436,000. Our 2019 investments will yield an additional 315 new child care slots and 151 improved quality slots by January 2020.

We have attached a list of the funded projects for 2018 and 2019 to our testimony. You'll see there's a wide variety of program types and sizes.

It's important to note that the program is limited by both available funds and the availability of technical assistance. In 2019, we received 124 inquiries for Make Way for Kids, which resulted in 27 complete applications. Of these 27 applications, we were able to fund and support 21 projects.

To expand both financial and technical capacity for 2019, Let's Grow Kids partnered with the Vermont Community Loan Fund (VCLF) to provide pre-grant technical assistance for applicants needing business planning assistance.

This kind of grant support, combined with expert technical assistance, is proving to be a promising practice. We've been working to make headway as quickly as possible and have just scratched the surface of "shovel ready" projects around the state. There is great opportunity to expand this work, especially focusing on areas of the state with the most severe need and those projects that might need more intensive support to be ready for investment.

Additionally, Make Way for Kids applicants are also eligible to apply for VCLF child care loans to start up, expand or improve their programs. In fact, programs have been able to leverage Make Way for Kids grants as collateral for VCLF loans.

We need to join together to take bold action to address the challenges Vermont's families and early care and learning providers face. Each year that passes by is a missed opportunity to improve the developmental wellbeing of our kids, support strong, healthy families, and improve our struggling economy. We know that you are working on solutions, and we look forward to working with you this session and in the coming years to continue to address these challenges.

### **Sharron Harrington – Perspectives from the Field**

As a Senior Program Manager, I work with a team to support affordable access to high-quality child care, as well as implement strategies to build a qualified early childhood workforce and develop early childhood leaders in 5 southern counties including Bennington, Windham, Rutland, Windsor and Orange. Our team provides coaching and technical assistance to individuals and community stakeholders who are interested in starting or expanding regulated child care programs. Today, I would like to speak with you about some of the challenges families and communities face to ensure children from all backgrounds have equal opportunity to experience high-quality early childhood education and the hardships families experience, especially those living in rural areas. I would also like to share a couple of examples of how financial investment and creative thinking can make all the difference for these families and communities.

It is widely known that access to regulated child care is a problem in Vermont, and there is just not enough capacity in high-quality early care and learning programs to ensure all children have equal opportunity. In rural areas this is especially true. Ideally, families would have choices and make decisions based on cost, location, hours of operation, and personal preference. Unfortunately, that is not possible when so many families don't even have access to any regulated child care. I would like to provide a couple examples of how the Let's Grow Kids Make Way for Kids grant program is addressing this issue.

Last week I spoke with a director of a child care program in Rutland who told me they have a child enrolled in their program from Londonderry. This means the family has a 45-minute drive one way. I'm not sure if this is by choice or necessity. However, currently in Londonderry there is only one FCC program offering 2 infant and 2 toddler slots. The next closest option for infant care is 15 miles away. There is also a significant shortage of preschool slots there. We would describe this as a child care desert – a term used to for areas with little or no access to child care. Through our Make Way for Kids grant program we are currently supporting the development of a new child care program that will serve 18 infants and toddlers and the expansion of West River Montessori School in South Londonderry. The West River Montessori School is a 5 STAR program that serves over eight towns in the surrounding area. Let's Grow Kids has awarded a \$10,000 grant to expand their classroom space and access to an existing bathroom to meet child care licensing regulations. In addition to adding 24 new slots for 3 and 4-year-old children they will also be able to increase their hours of operation to better accommodate the

needs of working families. Many families travel significant distances and sometimes back track their travel to their places of employment and this expansion will likely reduce stress that families face and provide more children the opportunity for a high-quality early education experience.

Another interesting project we will be supporting is in Bridgewater. Currently, there are no registered or licensed child care options and there are extensive waiting lists in adjacent Woodstock. When the town elementary school closed to consolidate, community members formed a Select Board-sanctioned committee to explore potential use for the building. Childcare became an obvious choice based on need and location.

The Bridgewater Area Community Foundation proposal was awarded a MWFK grant for just over \$23,000 and they have an impressive amount of in-kind contributions which they will use to create a high-quality licensed child care center. They will renovate and outfit a classroom and toileting area for 8 infants and 6 toddlers, as well as make a former elementary school playground developmentally appropriate for infants and toddlers. They are anticipating the program will be filled immediately.

Several Bridgewater business owners serve on the Board of Directors and understand the need for reliable, high quality childcare for their employees. In their proposal they stated “As part of our population ages, it will help us to continue to attract new residents and encourage our children to remain in Bridgewater as they look for places to raise their own families. The results would show up with increased property values, lower tax rates and a more vibrant and resilient economy.”

This is just one example of how communities are coming together, pooling resources and expertise to tackle the child care crisis. Projects such as this demonstrate lots of collaboration and creative problem solving.

Sometimes, it only takes a small investment to have a big impact for an existing high-quality early care and learning program to address a community need. This year, we have a grantee receiving less than \$3,000 for learning materials, nap mats, and classroom furniture to add 5 new toddler slots. The Children's Center, established in Proctor for the past 33 years is a full day, year-round, non-profit 4 STAR early care and learning program currently serving over 40 children. The program is a universal pre-K partner and collaborates closely with a 2018 Make Way for Kids grantee who started a new infant and toddler program in Proctor. Our 2018 grantee, Heather Martin's program Babysteps is now a feeder program for the Children's Center. This is an intentional approach to address community child care needs. Heather is an early childhood leader in Rutland County and is also consulting with Castleton University, another 2019 MWFK grantee, who will be starting a new child care program on campus.

In just the past 6 weeks, I have spoken to people in 4 out of the 5 counties where I work who are interested in starting or expanding programs. Communities are interested and ready to address the child care crisis, and I'm optimistic that we are moving in the right direction by offering financial resources and technical assistance. I appreciate your interest in our capacity building work and your commitment to Vermont's children and families. Thank you very much for your time.

**2018 Make Way for Kids Grantees**

Rutland Community Programs, Inc. Rutland County Head Start	Rutland
Village Early Learning Center, Inc.	Saxtons River
St. Johnsbury School District	St. Johnsbury
Myers Prouty Children's Campuses, Inc.-Monument Campus	Shaftsbury
The Collaborative	Londonderry
Barre Supervisory Union	Barre
Ascension Childcare, Inc.	Shelburne
Greater Rutland County Supervisory Union (GRCSU)	Rutland
Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, Inc.	Newport
PJ's Child Care Center	St. Albans
Mary L McDonald	Rutland
Little Wings Childcare	Brookfield
Little Mountaineers Home Child Care	South Royalton
Little Sparrow Learning Nest	Rutland
Baby Steps Childcare	Proctor
Lisa Duncan	Newport
Amber Bollman	West Burke
Amaryah Pendlebury	Brattleboro
Mary Johnson Children's Center	Middlebury
Almond Blossoms	St. Albans
Orange County Parent Child Center	Tunbridge
Full Circle Preschool	Burlington
Greater Burlington YMCA	Burlington
Sarah Holbrook Community Center	Burlington
Robin's Nest Children's Center	Burlington
Pine Forest Children's Center	Burlington
Burlington Children's Space	Burlington
Janet S. Munt Family Room	Burlington

**2019 Make Way for Kids Grantees**

Rutland County Parent Child Center	Rutland
Amaryah Pendlebury	Brattleboro
Bolton Valley Resort	Richmond
Rutland Community Programs, Inc. Rutland County Head Start	Rutland
West River Montessori School	South Londonderry
Children's Center at the Union Church	Proctor
Katie Swick	Montpelier
ABC & LOL Child Care Center & Preschool	St. Johnsbury
Little One's University Inc.	Essex Junction
Christina Blay	Troy
Martha Missale	Vernon
Georgia's Next Generation	Georgia
Butterfly Kisses Child Care Center	Newport
A.R.K. Child Care at Whiting	Whiting
Castleton University	Castleton
Bridgewater Area Community Foundation	Bridgewater
United Children's Services/ Bennington County Head Start	Bennington
Stepping Stones Preschool	Cavendish
Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development	Brattleboro
Woodstock Community Playschool, Inc., DBA Rainbow Playschool	Woodstock
The Plymouth Schoolhouse	Plymouth