

My name is Mary Undercoffler and I am currently a Family support home visitor through Children's Integrated Services, or CIS, at Lund.

Since 2009, the CIS program has been level funded which translates into a funding decrease for programs because the money available does not cover the annual cost of living increases.

Last summer, the Department for Children and Families (DCF) paid consultants to study CIS reimbursement rates and make recommendations. The study revealed that the current rate for CIS does not cover the cost of providing services. Because the Governor's budget proposal would continue to level fund CIS, the State plans to provide a statewide rate lower than what the study shows it actually costs our programs to provide the services. The rate study indicated that CIS actually costs \$634 per member per month and the current state plan is to fund CIS at \$502 Per member per Month.

For some regions, such as Chittenden County, this will involve a significant cut to our current funding, on top of eleven years of level funding for the program. This will translate to reductions in our capacity to serve children and families in need.

When a parent is dealing with substance use, mental illness, trauma, and their own adverse childhood experiences, what they need to break free of the cycle of poverty and abuse is so much more than just strategies on how to handle their toddler's tantrums. In that moment they may be feeling triggered as a result of the abuse they experienced as a child, guilt and shame that their substance use may have caused the behaviors, and unable to support their child's development and wellbeing due to their own past trauma. The CIS funding allows us as Family support home visitors to help them to identify this and develop new strategies to care for themselves and their child.

This is how my client was able to regain custody of her child. This mom, like many of my clients, was determined to overcome all of the hardships she had experienced and give her son a better childhood than she had, but she needed lots of support to do that. Throughout our time together, I was able to see her move away from ineffective parenting strategies that she has learned from her own family, and to stop projecting her own experiences onto her child. Her son began receiving physical therapy through CIS Early intervention to address some delays, and went from not being able to crawl, to running and climbing on everything. My client developed confidence in herself as a mother, and was able to be vulnerable enough to admit when things were hard and ask for help. Prior to receiving CIS services the "help" she got was advice that perpetuated harmful parenting practices, or resulted in her leaving her child with unsafe people so she could take a break after feeling so overwhelmed. Both forms of "help" put her child at physical and emotional risk. After receiving CIS services, she had a team of support who truly understood the circumstances of her situation, and who she felt she could turn to for educated, kind, and respectful guidance and support. She has been able to regain custody of her son and they continue to thrive.

Without CIS her son would most likely still be in foster care, and she would continue to struggle to break free from the cycle of abuse that she had known her entire life. We are asking that the Legislature fund CIS at a level that would cover the cost of providing the services so that we can

continue to serve families and support children. The planned cut to CIS in Chittenden County will result in fewer families receiving these critical services that ensure child well-being and safety.

We are asking that the Legislature fund CIS at a level that would cover the cost of providing the services. Taking the \$634 per member per month figure annually across the full CIS caseload, this would mean a \$2.4m increase in CIS funding in FY21.

Thank you.