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Senate Health and Welfare

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First off, I would like to thank you for the work and attention you put into the prevention bill. Parent Child Centers have long been the hub for prevention and intervention work for families with young children and we see the benefits every day of putting our efforts into prevention models. It has some of the biggest impacts on our society at a community and financial level.

You are now focusing on the child care bill, H. 531 and I ask that you take the same community focused approach to these conversations. The Parent Child Center Network supports this bill and its efforts to strengthen our child care system in Vermont. Childcare is one of the largest expenses families are faced with, often well over \$10,000/year. Expanding the Child Care Financial Assistance Program would allow more families to access more support at a crucial time in their family's development. Working parents are often faced with the terrifying truth that if they work hard and earn a raise at work, they will be worse off financially because their child care financial assistance will be lowered or ended all together. We should be supporting families with young children to thrive and be active members of our society while ensuring that their children have safe, high quality care at an affordable price.

Equally important is the work force within our child care programs. Teachers, while doing one of the most important jobs in our society (caring for and educating our next generation), are paid the least and face many challenges to achieving higher education required to grow in their chosen career. Supporting new efforts to offer scholarships and loan repayments will take a great step forward in growing a workforce that we, as a state, are desperately in need of and ensure our children have the most qualified teachers and to support our youngest Vermonters on their path to reach their full potential.

Within our child care centers and while meeting with families we also continue to see an increasing need for the young children within our Children's Integrated Services program. The dynamic needs of these young children continue to grow and providing quality care that meets their service needs continues to be a challenge. The Parent Child Center Network supports the House's position to not accept CIS "caseload savings." It is vital that this money be wrapped back into the CIS program: specifically into the bundled rate for CIS.

While every region of our state has strengths every region is also facing its own unique challenges. In Springfield, we are in a unique time in our history. We are one of the most impoverished areas of the state, we have a hospital that is struggling to keep its doors open, and we now have a child birth center

that will no longer exist in our local area, the ripple effects of which we have only begun to realize. It is a critical time for us to step in and support families. We are a resilient and adaptable region, but we also must have the resources necessary for our families and youngest citizens to thrive and be successful.

Parent Child Centers are perfectly positioned to be this resource to families within each community. Along with added support in the critical early childhood programs such as CCFAP and CIS the Parent Child Centers urge you to consider expanding on our flexible funds where we continually do all we can with extremely limited resources. We are urging you to advocate on behalf of families by increasing the PCC Master Grant by \$1.5 million dollars this year to provide flexible programming that is geared to our specific regions. We also seek \$1.5 million in one-time funding (an increase of \$500,000 from the budget passed by the house) in order to respond to the infrastructure needs that we have put off to get by during the many years of underfunding. In addition, we provide indispensable services to families through our Reach Up case management contracts and we are counting on you to reinstate those contracts so we can continue to do the meaningful work we are known for.

These requests of the Parent Child Centers are a significant priority for responding to the growing needs of the families in Vermont. My colleague Amy Johnson is also here and will speak further regarding some of these key issues.

Thank you for your time and efforts on behalf of families in Vermont.