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Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony today. My name is Joy Ely, and I'm the Deputy Director for Northeast Kingdom Community Action's Parent Child Centers. We are 2 of 15 Parent Child Centers within the Vermont Parent Child Center Network. We serve the three most rural Vermont counties: Caledonia, Orleans and Essex.

The Vermont Parent Child Center Network is requesting an increase to the base funding by \$1.5 million for a total of \$4.8 million in the FY23 budget. Additionally, for a second-year, we are seeking \$3.7 million in one-time funding to address the needs of families with young children who have been economically impacted during the COVID pandemic.

Supporting families throughout the pandemic would never have been possible without your support and commitment to our work through State funds. This past year, NEKCA Parent Child Centers served over 900 caregivers and over 1,000 children across 2,027 square miles in the most northern part of Vermont. When the pandemic forced the world to shut down, caregivers suddenly found themselves being parents, teachers, employees and were also socially isolated from families and friends. We adapted our 8 core services to ensure that families received supports that they could not access due to lack of community transportation, supply shortages, financial hardships that families were facing, and mental health struggles due to isolation. We have utilized these funds to support families who were struggling with housing insecurity, providing access to basic needs like cribs, car seats, diapers, masks, nutritious foods, and cleaning supplies. We utilized these funds to support families with children ages birth to 6 to gain access to technology for play groups, education, and support. When restrictions lightened, we developed safe in person playgroups, creative 1-1 home visiting and support groups to combat the social isolation that families were feeling especially in rural Vermont.

The Parent Child Centers have an amazing ability to hear what the family's needs are and adapt our services to ensure that prevention and support go hand in hand to strengthen Vermont's vulnerable families. Our two-generation approach became stronger by continuing to support parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors that were coming together to raise our children, and navigate this world that has become technology driven and socially and emotionally disconnected. PCC staff partner with families to identify and leverage their strengths, ensuring that immediate needs are met which in turn strengthens and builds resilient and healthy families.

In closing, please consider that the 15 Parent Child Centers:

- Perform prevention work that in turn actually saves money. PCC prevention programs and services ensure that parents have the knowledge, skills and resources they need to care for their children. We can strengthen families and the communities they live in.
- Do more with less and prevent expensive problems down the road the by supporting young families. Every dollar invested in building healthy communities reduces the demand on our health care system and helps to ensure that more people will be healthier for longer periods of their lives. PCCs are the answer to helping families get the crucial supports they need to build resiliency. Healthy children and stable families result in strong and resilient communities across Vermont.
- Build relationships with families before, during and after a crisis in their lives. Our multi-generational support is unique and has a proven track record. PCCs use a two-generation approach to deliver 8 core services to families that support their ability to navigate the daily complex challenges of life.

Please support the Parent Child center Network's request to increase the base funding by \$1.5 million, as well as a second-year of \$3.7 million in one-time funding to address pandemic needs.

Thank you again for taking time to read this today, I wish I had the ability to speak with you in person. I appreciate all your time and dedication in supporting the important work that we do with families during these challenging times.

Joy Ely

Deputy Director

Northeast Kingdom Community Action's Parent Child Centers