



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

To: House Appropriations Committee, Representative Mary Hooper, Chair

From: Kyle Dodson, CEO, Greater Burlington YMCA
Susan Fortier, Executive Director, The Meeting Waters YMCA

Date: January 10, 2022

Re: Budget Adjustment Act child care funding priorities

On behalf of the Vermont YMCAs, we want to thank the Vermont Legislature for prioritizing funding to stabilize the childcare system over the past nineteen months. But, we are writing to let you know today that critical staffing shortages are pushing our childcare facilities beyond sustainability and without continued prioritization and investment it will be a struggle to keep our doors open.

We urge the Legislature to continue to prioritize early childhood and to please support the Let's Grow Kids recommendation to appropriate **additional one-time dollars for FY 22 to foster a strong and stable childcare workforce immediately**. Everyday, we are forced to choose between closing programs or limiting enrollment. Our funding and workforce needs are at crisis levels and we need an investment now. This investment benefits Vermont families and Vermont employers and helps keep communities thriving, knowing their little ones are well cared for.

The Greater Burlington YMCA serves 190 children in its early childcare programs. Approximately, more than half of those children are infants and toddlers. We have three locations across Chittenden County, two in downtown Burlington, and we have a partnership with the UVM Medical Center to provide care at our Winooski-based center for UVM Medical Center employees. The Y understands the demands on Vermont families and the crucial role we can play in supporting them. The first years of a child's life are vitally important for brain development and the Y's high-quality programs nurture the potential of every child. Our programs are 5-STAR rated by the State of Vermont and are accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the benchmark of high-quality care.

We are proud of the work we have done throughout the pandemic to continue to serve our local communities with the highest quality programs that families deserve. **Like many other facilities in Vermont, we have faced record shortages in our workforce and have therefore had to shut down classrooms a number of times, leaving many of our families without a childcare solution.**

This doesn't just affect current families of the Y, it is also a problem for over 100 infants and their parents who are on a waitlist for our facility in Burlington. We have been trying to open two more infant classrooms in one of our two Burlington locations, but cannot because we simply can't get qualified applicants to fill our head teacher positions. Professionals are leaving the field, as they can't afford to work in early childcare. We need to incentivize staff to not only come into the field, but to remain. Many of our childcare providers cannot even afford their own childcare.

Please prioritize early childhood and the Vermont families that depend on us for their livelihood and the education of their young children. Please support the Let's Grow Kids recommendations to appropriate **additional one-time dollars for FY 22 to foster a strong and stable childcare workforce** immediately. This need is imminent, to keep our programs running. We look forward to continued partnership to ensure the best possible outcomes for Vermont's youngest children.

Respectfully submitted,

Kyle Dodson, CEO, Greater Burlington YMCA
Susan Fortier, Executive Director, The Meeting Waters YMCA

About the VT YMCAs:

The two YMCAs in Vermont serve more than 30,000 people across the state each year. Throughout its 160-year history, the YMCA has supported communities through incredible challenges, including world wars, economic recessions, and public health crises. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, the YMCAs continue to innovate to meet critical needs and want everyone to know: **We're here for good.**