

Theresa Utton-Jerman

Subject: FY23 Budget Hearing

From: Gretchen Elias

Sent: Wednesday, February 9, 2022 11:16 AM

Subject: feedback for the Appropriations Committees on proposed FY23 budget

My name is Gretchen Elias, and I serve as the Executive Director of Good Beginnings of Central Vermont. Based on our experience supporting families with new babies over the past 30 years, and during the pandemic, we would like to share with the House and Senate Appropriations Committees the following observations on the proposed FY23 budget.

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- The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the crucial role of the care infrastructure
- in ensuring that our economy runs smoothly and that businesses and public institutions can function.
- **The sustainability and viability of the care infrastructure is no less important**
- **than that of our physical infrastructure. One-time investments of federal funds should reflect that fact.**
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- Families with children under 5 remain particularly isolated. They will not be ‘fully vaccinated
- households’ for months to come. They must still weigh the value of each potential activity or outing against the fact that their household is not yet fully vaccinated.
- **Families with babies and young toddlers are also less likely to be connected to the**
- **formal structures used to get resources and services to households during the pandemic.**
- (eg, the free meals, devices, weekly surveillance testing, and at-home antigen tests provided via
- local school districts.)
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- **The**
- **early years of parenting are a time when having access to a village is especially essential for mental health.**
- Universal, non-clinical programs for new parents to connect with each other and with the
- community play an important role in Vermont’s early childhood and family mental health systems. They are also
- cost effective and can often go a long way to address families’ mental health needs before they escalate into a
- crisis.
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- **Because these are universal, preventative programs delivered by community partners,**
- **they can easily go overlooked when setting statewide funding priorities.**
- But they are a critical part of the equation. If these opportunities disappear, as many were forced
- to do during the pandemic, the downstream intensive services will feel the impact eventually. We will all
- benefit from an intentional focus on ensuring that vibrant community-based options return as soon as it is safe.
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In your budgetary decision-making process, we hope the legislature will 1) consider using federal funds for investments in the care infrastructure as well as in physical infrastructure, and 2) balance investments in acute mental health services with those that support the long-term mental health of families, parents, and caregivers. In particular, please consider the critical role that programs like ours, with our focus on prevention, and on universal, non-clinical social and community-based supports, play in Vermont's early childhood and family mental health systems.

Thank you for all your hard work on behalf of Vermonters.

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Gretchen Elias

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Executive Director | Good Beginnings of Central Vermont

Celebrating 30 years of bringing community to families and their babies!

