

February 9, 2021

Dear Representative Ann Pugh,

I want to thank you and the other Human Services Committee members for the thoughtful questions posed during the hearing regarding the dismantling of the Child Development Division (CDD). As a CIS Child Care Coordinator (CIS CCC) in Addison County, I can speak directly to the importance of maintaining the CDD, its vision, and work.

During the hearing Rep. Jessica Brumsted asked a question as to whether or not CIS was working; meeting the needs of children and families. I want to say yes and no, and please let me explain.

I want to speak directly about Specialized Child Care. The following is from our State literature explaining what SCC is:

Specialized Child Care (SCC) is part of the continuum of coordinated services offered through Children's Integrated Services (CIS) in Vermont communities. SCC offers an array of services and supports to families and children with identified specialized child care needs, and to child care providers and CIS specialists working with families to assure that these children experience success in child care settings that meet their needs.

Specialized Child Care serves three populations:

1. Children and families with open Family Support or custody cases with the Family Services Division of the Department for Children and Families (called Protective Services Child Care)
2. Families experiencing significant stress (called Family Support Child Care)
3. Children with special physical, mental or emotional needs called Child With Special Health Needs

It has been well documented that the needs of children, families and child care providers have increased since CIS inception in 2009. Yet, funding for these programs has seen little change, and in some areas has been decreased.

It is common knowledge that there has been an increase in the number of children and families with open DCF/Family Services cases. Many of these children are in child care. Many of these children come into childcare having experienced excessive stress and/or trauma.

It is also common knowledge that the state of Vermont has seen a decrease in the number of licensed and registered child care providers. It has also been documented

that the early care system faces a shortage of well qualified teachers in centers, and well trained registered providers.

What these last two paragraphs mean is that we have a higher concentration of high needs children in fewer child care programs. This is causing significant stress on the child care industry to properly address the needs of these children and their families. Why?

With little funding increases, or actual cuts in funding, there are fewer people trying to handle the increased caseloads. We are not afraid of hard work, what this is about, is the watered down version of services to try and meet the increased number of families each person serves. It is about the quality of this work, how we feel we are doing, and having to accept the knowledge that more should be offered to truly make a difference in the overall outcomes.

For example, in Addison County, the on-the-ground supports for child care providers has been dramatically reduced due to lack of funding to support the needed staffing. Other counties too have seen a dramatic decrease in their consultation to early childhood programs, at this critical time when more is needed.

In my role, as the CIS CCC, I too am supposed to be able to address the needs of children in care. Working with providers to shore up their understanding of social/emotional develop; how trauma impacts development, and thus influences behaviors that can present significant challenges to programs.

However, some of us in my role around the state, myself included, saw our funding cut; by almost 50 percent. Although the state requires district to hire a full time CIS CCC when cases reach 150 children, the funds are not there to support such an expense to agencies.

Should CDD move its services to other agencies, Specialized Child Care, as it functions now, would fall under possibly four departments:

- Vt. Dept. of Health for the Home Visiting segment of our work
- Vt. Dept. of Mental Health: for the Early Childhood Early Mental Health consultation to programs with children birth to age 5
- Vt. Dept. for Children and Families for the pieces of our work that entails Family Support/Child With Special Health Needs, and Protective services financial assistance program, and transportation, as well as our integrated work with social workers on finding and enrolling children in the most appropriate programs to meet each child's need
- Agency of Education: as noted in CDD's proposal, however, what we do falls under the above agencies

What Rep. Brumsted asked is at the heart of what is needed to be addressed. For CIS services to work at its optimum of addressing the needs of children, families and

providers, a serious look at how funding can be increased to meet the demands in each region is required. The dismantling of CDD is not the answer. Those in CIS now are working their best to meet the needs. However, without a serious commitment to addressing the funding shortages, the full capacity of this work will not be realized.

Respectfully,

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