

Good Morning. My name is Elizabeth Brown and I am the current Head Start Director for Rutland County Head Start. I am here to share our experience and challenges with the current model of reimbursement that is based on attendance vs. enrollment and to express my support for the passing of the child care bill H.171.

In order to really understand the challenges we are currently facing and have faced in the past, it will be important to go back to 2010. In 2010 the state ended contracted slots. These contracted slots meant predictable income and in turn a clearer way to intentionally plan for the fiscal year ahead. When the contracted slots ended and we moved to an attendance based model, Rutland County Head Start had to terminate five full time employees due to the significant loss of revenue and the unpredictable income we received. This shift and the current model makes stabilizing our budget and even our staffing very difficult. The overhead costs of staffing, facilities, program supplies, and administrative costs do not change based on a child's attendance... the costs are consistent. In other words, the revenue decreases but the costs are the same, therefore, that loss in revenue is felt deeply and leaves programs like ours on their own to try to stabilize themselves financially. While much of our funding comes from the federal government, we do rely on CCFAP to round out our budget and to support our ability to provide children with full time early care and education programming that many of our full time working families need. Without a consistent income, organizations like Head Start will always feel at the mercy of the attendance records of our children. This really doesn't make sense.

Rutland County Head Start serves children and families with multiple risk factors which makes them some of the most vulnerable individuals in our community. In some cases we are a family's last resort for care, because of the high quality staff we hire, the comprehensive services we offer, and the mental health services that we have integrated into our program. Like our the children and families we walk alongside we too need stability and consistency to ensure our programming can continue and can maintain the high quality care and education we are passionate about delivering.

In 2019-2020 alone Rutland County Head Start suffered a loss of over 200k worth of funding through child care subsidy. This loss has created a significant reduction in our emergency reserves and will be felt for many years to come. It is so hard for me to understand why when a child is out due to a multitude of reasons that are beyond our control we as organizations must front the bill.

It is my hope that this committee will demonstrate it's dedication and investment into the lives of our youngest and most vulnerable residents by passing the childcare bill H.171 and by allowing us to not only survive but thrive regardless of the adversities we may face as we work hard to provide the highest level of care and education to the children and families in Vermont. Thank you for your time and consideration.