



Date: April 2, 2021

To: Chair Lyons and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures, Beth Truzansky, Deputy Director, Building Bright Futures

Re: H. 171: An act relating to the governance and financing of Vermont's child care system

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### **Executive Summary**

1. **Section 9 - 33 V.S.A. § 4603 | Building Bright Futures' Powers and Duties:** Building Bright Futures (BBF) State Advisory Council (SAC) is amenable to the additions to Chapter 46 as written in the current version of H. 171. However, the BBF SAC is in the process of formally reviewing our legislative charge and sees multiple opportunities to update membership and charges articulated in statute. It is our intent to bring our full recommendations for updating Chapter 46 before the General Assembly during the 2022 session.
  2. **Sections 10 & 11- RECOMMENDATIONS; AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021; CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT & CHILD CARE STABILIZATIONS GRANTS:** Building Bright Futures is the appropriate entity to partner with the Department for Children and Families to convene a working group of key stakeholders to inform the utilization of Child Care Development Block Grant funding AND Child Care Stabilization Grants funding received by the State pursuant to the American Rescue Plan of 2021. BBF is committed to partnering with DCF and has already engaged in discussions to support this effort.
  3. **Section 13 - CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEMS ANALYSIS STUDY:** Building Bright Futures affirms the need for this study section. BBF is the appropriate organization to execute the systems analysis study. However, BBF needs appropriate funding (\$200,000) to execute the scope of work required.
  4. **Overall BBF is appropriately tasked in sections 9, 10, 11, and 13 and will be able to execute the scope of work ONLY IF appropriately funded by both (1) increasing our base legislative appropriation by \$261,000 annually which was recommended by the House Committee on Human Services and unanimously included in the budget passed by the House Committee on Appropriations, and (2) that BBF is provided with \$200,000 (one-time funds) to execute the systems analysis study through either ARPA or the General Fund.**
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Dear Chair Lyons and members of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare,

My name is Dr. Morgan Crossman, the Executive Director of the Building Bright Futures (BBF), Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council mandated under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the Federal Head Start Act. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to your committee with regard to the role of BBF in H. 171: An act relating to the governance and financing of Vermont's child care system.

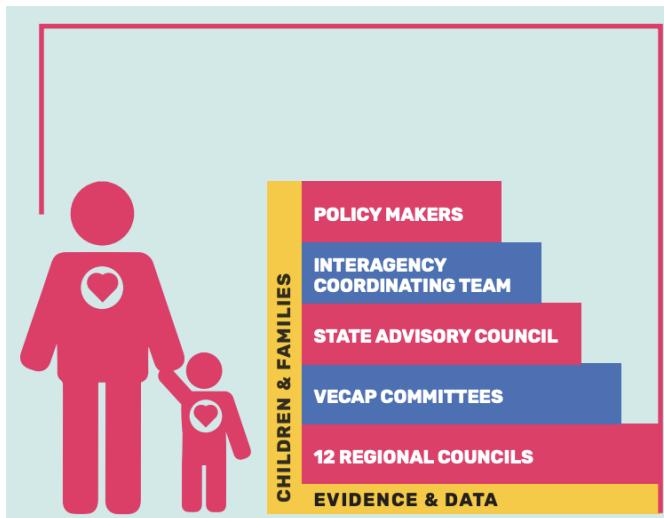
### **Building Bright Futures' Infrastructure and Role in Vermont's Early Childhood System**

BBF is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33 Chapter 46 to be Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age eight and their families. BBF's mission is to improve the well-being of children and families in Vermont by using evidence to inform



policy and bringing voices together across sectors and within regions to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve. BBF maintains the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's Early childhood system.

BBF's infrastructure includes a **network of over 450 early childhood stakeholders** that come together monthly to support the work of the broader system:



## 12 Regional Councils

At the base of the pyramid in bright pink (visual on the left), is 12 regional councils that bring together partners across sectors on a monthly basis to identify the gaps, barriers, and challenges faced by kids and families. These tables also support the development of innovative strategies to fill gaps and respond to meet the needs of the region.

## 7 Vermont Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP) committees (listed below)

Each VECAP Committee is responsible for upholding and monitoring a component of Vermont's early childhood strategic plan to inform

strategy and identify where we, as a state, have made progress. Each committee has a concrete charge that is dictated either by the VECAP goal and/or by grant funding. Each committee is staffed by volunteer public and private co-chairs with support primarily from the BBF Deputy Director. Committee membership are all volunteers and come from public and private partners who participate in monthly meetings. Descriptions of each committee can be found [here](#).

VECAP Goal	Committee
Goal 1- All children have a healthy start	Child Outcomes Accountability Team
Goal 2 - Families and communities play a leading role in children's well-being	Families and Communities Committee
Goal 3 - All children and families have access to high-quality opportunities that meet their needs	Early Learning and Development Committee Professional Preparation and Development Committee
Goal 4 - The early childhood system will be integrated, well-resourced, and data-informed	Early Childhood Interagency Coordinating Team Early Childhood Investment Committee Data and Evaluation Committee
VECAP committees are supported and informed by the State Advisory Council, BBF Regional Councils, and a host of EC committees and work groups.	



### **Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council (SAC)**

The State Advisory Council (SAC) brings together cross-sector early childhood leaders 8-11 times per year to issue recommendations, increase coordination to advance a connected and evolving early childhood system, and advise the Governor and Legislature on the well-being of children and families across Vermont. SAC membership is designated through Chapter 46. The SAC can currently include up to 23 governor-appointed members across public and private early childhood leaders and stakeholders. One of the most recent SAC meetings held on February 22nd included over 225 stakeholders who came together to discuss early childhood policy and discuss systems integration.

BBF informs this infrastructure by identifying and presenting the most up-to-date high-quality data. Our regional and statewide infrastructure allows BBF to have a presence in every corner of the state and in all communities. This network allows for the communication and escalation of barriers, and challenges and recommendations from both regions and from the State Advisory Council to policy makers. As decisions are made, the BBF infrastructure facilitates changes to the Early Childhood system to improve the lives of children and families across the state.

### **BBF State Advisory Council Recommendations**

As you know, the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill. Instead, our role is to provide recommendations that move the early childhood system toward the 4 goals identified in Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (VECAP). Of note, the BBF SAC did produce a series of 5 recommendations which can be found in the 2020 [How are Vermont's Young Children and Families Report](#), pgs 6-11. The recommendations related to H. 171 are listed below for reference.

### **RECOGNIZE VERMONT'S EARLY CARE & EDUCATION SYSTEM & WORKFORCE AS ESSENTIAL**

#### **Recommendation 1: Fund education costs and compensation for the early childhood education workforce, including scholarships, loan repayment, and wage supplementation.**

- Sufficiently fund and expand scholarship programs for early educators and maintain this revenue annually.
- Establish a loan repayment program for early educators.
- Establish a wage supplement program to progress toward adequate compensation for early educators.
- Prioritize workforce development and hazard pay for this sector.

#### **Recommendation 2: Continue investment in redesigning the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) by making progress in alignment with Year 3 of the state's 5-year plan, including:**

- Increase the CCFAP rate paid to early care and education providers so those reimbursement rates closely reflect the true cost of high-quality care thereby reducing the burden on early care and education programs to subsidize the system through low wages and other cost-saving efforts.



- Fully support needed investments in the technology system(s), staff and resources required to implement the redesigned CCFAP structure and providing an accessible platform for families, educators, and administrators.

## EVOLVE OUR DATA SYSTEM TO ADDRESS GAPS

**Recommendation 3: Fully fund existing early childhood data initiatives to fidelity: Early Childhood Information System (e.g. Bright Futures Information System, Children's Integrated Services) and the State Longitudinal Data System.**

**Recommendation 4: Create an early childhood budget that identifies all financial sources dedicated to children and their families from prenatal to age eight to monitor, align and leverage financial resources.**

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### Considerations for H. 171 Section 9 - 33 V.S.A. § 4603 | [Building Bright Futures' Powers and Duties](#)

**BBF's ROLE:** The Building Bright Futures (BBF) State Advisory Council (SAC) is amenable to the additions to [Chapter 46](#) as written in the current version of H. 171. However, the BBF SAC is in the process of formally reviewing our legislative charge alongside data and needs of the early childhood system and sees multiple opportunities to update membership and charges articulated in statute. On Monday, March 22nd, 2021, the SAC onboarded 7 new public and private council members. A portion of the meeting was used to orient new members and to start a discussion about the role, responsibilities and membership of the SAC. The existing statute, while incredibly important in establishing this team and body of work, should be updated to account for the incredible accomplishments Vermont's early childhood leaders have embarked on over the past 10 years and to reflect the present moment of what's needed to support children and families statewide. Further, the systems analysis will reveal additional needs and opportunities that should be addressed in Chapter 46. Therefore, once the systems analysis is completed and we (the current SAC) have reviewed the current data and needs, is our intent to bring our full recommendations for updating Chapter 46 before the General Assembly during the 2022 session.

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### Considerations for H. 171 Section 10 - RECOMMENDATIONS; AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021; CHILD CARE DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT & Section 11 - RECOMMENDATIONS; AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT OF 2021; CHILD CARE STABILIZATIONS GRANTS:

**BBF's ROLE:** Building Bright Futures is the appropriate entity to partner with the Department for Children and Families to convene a working group of key stakeholders to inform the utilization of Child Care Development Block Grant funding and Child Care Stabilization Grants funding received by the State pursuant to the American Rescue Plan of 2021. BBF has expertise convening and facilitating diverse groups of stakeholders on a range of early childhood topics and developing recommendations to support the Administration and General Assembly in data and stakeholder-informed decision-making. BBF is committed to partnering with DCF and has already engaged in discussions to support this effort.



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## Considerations for H. 171 Section 13 - CHILD CARE AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION SYSTEMS ANALYSIS STUDY:

**BBF's ROLE:** BBF has been named to undertake an analysis that evaluates and makes recommendations regarding early care and education governance, the results of which will be reported to the General Assembly by September 1, 2022. This is an important topic worthy of formal study and critical to supporting children and families statewide and BBF was initially created for exactly this purpose; to have the flexibility and robust infrastructure to adapt to emerging legislative, community, public and private early childhood needs. The Blue Ribbon Commission laid the foundation for this analysis. This work is in line with our mandate under Act 104, our mission of using evidence and data to inform policy, and our neutral convenor role. BBF is well-poised to execute this analysis with appropriate financial support

**FUNDING:** In order to execute a task of this magnitude we need financial resources to support additional staffing and a contractor. The request is comparable to the state's previous work in 2015-2019 to execute the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality Affordable Child Care, which included the need for additional staff and the hiring of a contractor to support the work. We ask that you consider the following financial, staffing, participation implications:

- **A 1-time expense of \$200,000 to (1) hire a contractor** to support project management, administrative tasks, meeting facilitation, synthesis of meeting/focus group notes, report development and legislative testimony and (2) to support **BBF staff time to oversee all aspects of the study** (planning, agenda development, facilitation guide development and facilitation support, coordination and organization of planning teams, attendance at working group meetings, participant outreach, report writing, ongoing legislative testimony).

**TIMING:** BBF can execute the scope of work in the timeline allotted with the support of a contractor and participation of cross-sector public and private partners.

BBF affirms the need for this study section and believes in our ability to execute this work successfully if appropriately funded. We appreciate the committee's willingness to consider additional resource allocation for this bill.

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## Final Considerations for the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (BBF SAC)

Overall BBF is appropriately tasked in sections 9, 10, 11, and 13 and will be able to execute the scope of work ONLY IF appropriately funded by:

1. Increasing our base legislative appropriation by \$261,000 annually (see request on page 6). **This increase was recommended by the House Committee on Human Services and unanimously included in the budget passed by the House Committee on Appropriations**, and
2. BBF is provided with \$200,000 (one-time funds) to execute the systems analysis study through either ARPA or the General Fund.



## BUILDING BRIGHT FUTURES STATE ADVISORY COUNCIL | ALLOCATION INCREASE

As stated in the executive summary, BBF will be able to execute the scope of work ONLY IF appropriately funded by increasing our base legislative appropriation by \$261,000 annually which was recommended by the House Committee on Human Services and unanimously included in the budget passed by the House Committee on Appropriations. The information below further describes this request.

### Executive Summary of BBF Allocation Increase

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is requesting to increase our legislative allocation by \$261,000 annually (a total of \$505,000) to meet our charge under state and federal statute: to serve as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council. This increase would represent parity with other boards and commissions. BBF has demonstrated our role by:

- Providing data and being a resource and key advisor to the legislature,
- Engaging and elevating the voices of families and communities across the state,
- Building capacity of state agencies in gathering and providing information to the field through webinars and forums, responding to requests from the legislature to gather information (for testimony and study sections) and filling gaps within regions to directly support children and families.
- Maintaining a network of over 450 early childhood leaders and stakeholders to articulate the vision of, and make progress on Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan (strategic plan)
- Improving the outcomes of all children prenatal to age eight and their families
- Supporting early childhood emergency response throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

### BBF's Legislative Allocation

BBF is both public and privately funded which allows us to maintain our ability to serve as a neutral convener at all levels of our infrastructure, ensuring all voices are represented in decision-making. Current state appropriations do not sufficiently support even a quarter of our mandates under Act 104. Currently, only \$244,000 of our \$1.3 million budget, comes from legislative appropriations, which is approximately 19%. To execute our work in a way that truly meets the need of the early childhood system in a sustainable way, we would require additional base public investment of \$261,000 annually (a total of \$505,000 annual base allocation), which would support our capacity to adapt quickly to execute research and information gathering projects, a clear need and part of the initial and continued vision for BBF and for the state of Vermont as we serve in our advisory role. Since our creation, BBF has not received an increase in state funding.

### Additional Considerations

Parity: When reviewing similar commissions and advisory body state allocations from the Governor's annual budget, the majority receive a much higher legislative allocation and covers up to 100% of their budgets, which raises issues of funding parity. Examples include the Vermont Commission on Women (\$405,791), Developmental Disabilities Council (\$676,110), the Human Rights Commission (\$718,182), the Vermont Arts Council (\$722,859), and the Human Services Board (\$828,689).

Confusing naming in budget: [603645 VT Alliance for Children \\$244,000 \(FY2022 - pg 803/804\)](#) -Of note, the funding line above is dedicated to the Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council. It is



incorrectly named, creating confusion about which group receives this funding (this funding does NOT go to the Vermont Children's Alliance or the Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance). The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council is NOT an advocacy organization. BBF is named in state statute under Vermont's Title 33, Chapter 46. We are quasi-governmental (public and private partners including legislators and non-voting membership from the Governor's Office) and are charged as the primary advisor to the Governor and Legislature on the well-being of children and families in Vermont.

**Existing mechanism to route allocation:** BBF's current legislative allocation is routed through the Head Start Collaboration Office within the Child Development Division. This existing mechanism can be amended to include the additional funding.

Thank your consideration of these topics and for continuing to keep children and families at the center of our decision-making.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that appears to read "MKC".

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