

**January 14, 2021 Mary
Feldman, M.S.Ed.**

Good morning. My name is Mary Feldman and I am the executive director of the Parent Child Center of Rutland County. I appreciate the opportunity to share with you the good news of the work the state legislature has accomplished with CRF funds over the past few months in responding to the needs of Vermont families who utilize the extensive services provided by the statewide network of Parent Child Centers. The Parent Child Center network is grateful for the \$1,621,001 direct allocation.

We can all agree that we have come through tough and unprecedented times and yet with the resilience of the human spirit, you have responded, the Parent Child Centers have responded, and our communities have felt their needs acknowledged during scary times. The end in sight feels to some of us quite a ways away, especially when things "return to normal" -- there will be a big cleanup. So again, thank you for your work which helped us to respond to our individual Parent Child Center community needs.

COVID provided a new landscape for the work we do. It might be hard to imagine how life changed for the ordinary community person. Suddenly, food shopping was both unaffordable and inaccessible. Parent Child Centers responded with food for children and families who were suddenly unemployed and suddenly unable to take care of the immediate needs of their families. Food insecurity, a humbling concept, and a stressful experience was mitigated by the funding provided by the State through Parent Child Centers. Rutland County Parent Child Center mobilized its forces and was able to provide food on level with what we might consider to be our own little National Guard on an ONGOING basis. 45,000 meal equivalents have been delivered to Rutland County families on a monthly basis. Your funding provided the refrigeration and freezer units to provide these foods safely. The purchase of tents helped this to be accomplished in a warm and safe environment for staff and recipients alike. Many Parent Child Centers were able to provide food because of CRF funding.

For many folks, COVID has been about isolation -- and these are individuals who previous to COVID experienced the isolation of raising children alone, children with developmental needs, and parents, many of whom, do not have the skills and understanding of the developmental needs of children to cope (parents, who face the constant struggle of simply surviving). With the funds that you provided for technology, as common for some of us as this is as having electricity, for others a pure luxury item -- Covid taught us that technology can unify disenfranchised people and provide a strong connection to parenting classes, early childhood education, Children's Integrated Services (supporting our youngest kiddos who are behind the starting gate), teen parents who wanted to continue their high school education in our Learning Together program, and had to do so from home, and help to parents who are facing addiction. The technology provided a link from person to person without the dangers of exposure. The CRF funds made all of this possible and prevented, I believe, a lot of folks losing their grip and staying focused during this time. Technology allowed all of our services to be continued

seamlessly. In fact, Parent Child Centers did NOT decrease services, but increased accessibility during this time.

Technology does not put gas in the car or keep the electricity on. The CRF funding extended to providing concrete financial supports to families at this time which included gas cards, food, phone cards, wifi for connectivity, winter clothing, and for staff internet who shouldered the expense to work from home.

We recognize that to contain the virus folks need to STAY HOME period. In order for some to stay home, the Parent Child Center staff had to operate directly on the front lines. Included in the spending of the CRF monies was hazard pay that honored directly many staff who are among the lowest paid in the state for their incredible work in early childhood education. Additionally, there were monies spent on protective gear, cleaning supplies, and structural changes that enabled opportunities for staff to safely interact with families in need. Because of the CRF funds, safety was able to be our priority,

A large part of the work Parent Child Centers accomplish is focused on our youngest community members. CRF funding was able to provide families with activity bags, the technology to connect over those activity bags, and outdoor gear for families to get outside and play (consequently fostering really positive and safe interactions with parents and children). Children's Integrated Services, which operates at a deficit, was able to provide developmentally appropriate materials that remained in the homes. Additionally, some early childhood education (daycare centers) were able to provide outdoor equipment that decreased contact and possible spread of COVID among children in daycare settings.

The Parent Child Centers have a reputation for delivering high quality early childhood education across the state. These centers are not only important for helping parents return to work and jump starting our economy but they impact long term outcomes for these children. Research has indicated that COVID's impact on low income, minority, and families with children who have special education needs is devastating. Parent Child Centers have worked hard to mitigate the impact of these. One year of learning loss for a child posits a lifetime loss of \$80K in income over time. The economic impact of children's learning loss for one year at a national level is 98 billion dollars. Children's learning loss is EVERYONE's problem. The impact on the local level will be felt in the healthcare industry, in increased crime and incarceration, and in political participation of these children when they grow up. CRF funding that supports continuation of early childhood education, lost revenue and school aged programs are CRITICAL to us mitigating the impact of this over time in Vermont.

The Child Development Division had requirements for reopening child care centers and consequently reopening the economy. Parent Child Centers which operate at a 30% structural deficit simply did not have the money to make these renovations and at the same time,

Parent Child Centers were losing revenue that supports continuation of services. Providing opportunities to compensate for some of our revenue loss kept us in the playing field.

There will be a time when COVID is a thing of the past, thankfully. However, we are nowhere near that yet. Parent Child Centers have historically been the trusted support system for Vermont families. The lost revenue is critical to keeping Parent Child Centers afloat as we continue to navigate COVID and as we look forward to rebuilding our lives, communities, and economy and paving a way forward.

For more specific information on local spending, please refer to the document provided in detail by Action Circles on CRF spending for the Parent Child Center Network.

Thank you for your time and for all you have done for us and thank you for consideration of ongoing funding ensuring that Parent Child Centers will be able to continue their work for Vermont families.