



February 8, 2021
Budget Hearing Testimony

My name is Chloe Learey, I am the Executive for The Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development in Brattleboro. The Prouty Center is the fiscal agent and primary provider for Children's Integrated Services (CIS) in the Brattleboro AHS region. Prouty also holds contracts for providing other community-based services including Family Supportive Housing, and Community Child Care Support Services, which includes eligibility determination for childcare financial assistance and childcare referral services. Our Early Learning Center provides early education to 60 children, infants through age 5. Winston Prouty is not the Parent Child Center in the region, although we look very similar to some of the PCCs.

The integration of services to families with young children has been one of the most innovative and effective aspects of Vermont's early childhood system. CIS brings together nurse and family support home visiting, early intervention for children ages birth to 3, early childhood family mental health, and specialized childcare. The goal is for families to have access to a full complement of supports they may need to help their child have the strongest start possible without having to go to multiple organizations and providers. CIS services are funded and billed using a managed-care model which allows for agencies to have the flexibility to work with families that may have short but intensive needs for something like breastfeeding support, to complex multi-year interventions for a child with developmental delay. The structure of CIS requires local partners to manage resources while providing ease of access and continuity for families.

CIS has been level funded since 2009 which translates into a funding decrease. Even before the pandemic, children were not able to access services as often as needed often because of the difficulty of hiring and retaining skilled staff. In 2019 the Child Development Division (CDD) of the Department for Children and Families (DCF) paid consultants Burns and Co. to study CIS reimbursement rates and make recommendations as part of efforts toward payment reform seen in other parts of state government. Even after that study, the State continued to offer a Per Client Per Month (PCPM) case rate to CIS fiscal agents that was only 79% of the actual costs of services, leaving local agencies with a large financial gap to fill.

We are seeking an increase to funding across the state for Children's Integrated Services. The current total annual CIS funding is approximately \$10 million. The 2018 Burns study found that it actually costs \$634 PCPM to provide the services—after two years, the inflation adjusted rate would now be \$666 per client per month, requiring a \$3.06 million increase in the annual CIS budget to bring it to \$13.06 million.

CIS is an innovative system that allows families to access what they need to support their child's development, while requiring community-based agencies to collaborate and make the most of their resources. Research demonstrates that quality interventions and supports for children ages 0-5 have among the highest return on investment across human services at approximately 13%. It is time the State recognizes the value of this work for our community and our youngest citizens and commits to supporting it in a sustainable way.