



Testimony of Donna Bailey
January 12, 2022
Senate Health & Welfare Committee
RE: S.91

Hello, my name is Donna Bailey and I am the Co-Chair of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network (VPCCN) and the Director of the Addison County Parent/Child Center (ACPCC). Here with me is Margot Holmes, my fellow Co-Chair and Director of the Springfield Area Parent Child Center (SAPCC).

I am here to ask you for your committee's support on S.91 and to ask you to support our request for funding in the fiscal year 2023 budget:

- We are asking for a second year of \$3.7 million one-time funding for the Parent Child Centers to support families with young children as they are still dealing with the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We are also requesting an increase in base funding for the Parent Child Centers by \$1.5 million for a total of \$4.8 million in the PCC line.

As you know, the PCCs have been on the front lines throughout the COVID pandemic, and we continue to see our families with young children struggling to get through this very challenging time. We have been here for them for at least the past 30 years, and we will continue to be here for them, whatever comes our way. We do need support from the state to be able to continue to provide the services and supports that our families need, and we are asking for your support of our request this year.

The Parent Child Centers are well equipped to work as community partners with the state and to work with children, youth and families in our communities. I used to cringe when I heard, "If you have seen one Parent Child Center, you have seen one Parent Child Center" – implying that we are all very different and that we should have to look at apples to apples, and we are too different. I now defend that statement and am proud to say that we are community agencies that have grown to meet the needs of young families in our communities and therefore have some differences.

We have had to string together diverse funding and we are able to meet those funding requirements while being responsive to unique community needs. We all provide the 8 core services listed in the legislation. One of the 8 core services is concrete supports in times of need which is defined as a protective factor that can buffer and support children and families during good times and bad. Concrete supports mean having access to goods and services that address a family's needs, such as support for food, housing, clothing, health care, and childcare. Some PCCs have diaper banks that give out thousands of free diapers, wipes and formula, some PCCs have on site food banks and all PCCs are the statewide recipients of the Community Based Child Abuse Prevention dollars which provide flexible funding for families with immediate needs such as transportation, housing or childcare that are not otherwise met by other state resources.

The Parent Child Center Network is a well-established entity that provides support and accountability statewide to the 15 existing Parent Child Centers. We meet as a Network monthly and more. We participate in peer reviews and work on our own programming and help each other and other organizations to do so. Along with strengthened

partnership with the state this bill would support the clear designation of Parent Child Centers, ensuring that all entities within the Network are providing the high-quality work expected in the legislation, and provide the Network a role in this accountability. Designation every 6 years provides a PCC that may be struggling to be given time to correct any issues and ensure they are providing the quality services needed for this designation. If, for any reason, this was no longer the case, the Network would partner in the responsibility to identify a new Parent Child Center for a specific region of the state. The bill has language for that process, if it becomes necessary.

Parent Child Centers provide a level of care that cuts across prevention, intervention and treatment. We are part of the continuum of care that the state has created as a safety net for all Vermonters in need. We work with families of all backgrounds, focusing our most intensive programming, Learning Together for example, on the families most in need. All new parents need support, and we are happy to help with Welcome Baby programming, CIS services, play groups, etc.

We are helping those Vermonters involved with state systems such as DCF Family Services and Economic Services navigate sometimes difficult state systems. We are helping young families dream of a better life through education and mental health and substance recovery. We help families get and keep housing. Many of us provide childcare in our communities.

Again, we are a part of the safety net Vermont has so wisely provided for those of us in need at different times in our lives. Parent Child Centers make lives better for many families. We create community and connection where there may be little or none. We love these families and are professional and are helping to get families off to a good start so that they can be healthy and strong.

Our staff are professionals and work hard for low wages. We know that the most important thing for a young child is a consistent caregiver. We want parents to be that for their children and when they are working, we want consistency of care for their children. We want our staff to not turn over so there are familiar faces for children and parents. To do so, we need consistent funding.

I have been at the ACPCC since 1998. I can tell you that in the time I have been here, and before – I worked at Lund prior to being in Addison – I have seen families' lives improve and the work of agencies increase professionalism. There is a lower drop-out rate from high schools in Vermont, a lower teen pregnancy rate in the state, a higher literacy rate amongst parents, more home ownership in families, a better rate of prenatal care and primary doctor visits, etc. We are doing better, and it is not by accident. We need the support to continue these trends. We have seen the disparities during this pandemic, and we have not reached the mountain top.

Parent Child Centers are a good investment. We are providing care in the present, for the future. Helping families to become self-sufficient while not isolated from resources and support is what we do. Helping young children be healthy and secure. This is our daily work, and it will save all of us many dollars and heartache in the future.

Thank you for the work you have done and for the support of this bill and its funding this year and over the years that have gotten us here. We could not do this important work without your strength here.