

April 12, 2023

Members of the House Human Services Committee:

Thank you for giving me time to testify on S.56 as a Community Child Care Support Agency on. I am Chloe Learey, Executive Director of The Winston Prouty Center in Brattleboro. Winston Prouty is a multi-service agency providing support to young children and their families and early care and learning programs in the region. Our services include a child care program with 55 slots, serving as fiscal agent for Children's Integrated Services and providing Early Intervention, Nursing, Family Support, Behavior Consultation and Specialized Child Care; Family Supportive Housing; the Early Learning Express Bookmobile; the Child and Adult Care Food Program for 23 home-based childcare programs; Child Care Resource and Referral; and Child Care Financial Assistance (CCFAP).

Winston Prouty became southeastern Vermont's regional Community Child Care Support Agency (CCCSA) in 2017 after merging with Windham Child Care.

Each region has a CCCSA housed at different agencies. There is not a formal network of these agencies anymore, although many of us work together. The primary function of a CCCSA is to help families find child care and help them pay for it through financial assistance if they are eligible. Families find out about these services through multiple channels: we do outreach to employers, child care programs, doctor's offices, WIC, and through social media. Eligibility specialists on staff help families complete and submit the application and then will process it locally through the statewide database.

CCFAP eligibility for children in protective services, children with special health needs, and family support childcare for families who may not typically be eligible for assistance but are experiencing stressors that elevate their need for support to have their child in care is determined by Specialized Child Care Coordinators, who work as part of Children's Integrated Services.

The proposed increase in eligibility for CCFAP in both the Governor's Recommended Budget and S. 56 will increase the number of families using CCFAP and therefore the workload for CCCSA's and it is very important for resources such as the \$2 million designated in the Governor's budget to support that growth. It is also important for families to access eligibility specialists locally if we really want to encourage the broader range of families to use the benefit. One looming question is how potential increased demand for spots will impact the childcare market where most programs already have waiting lists. The lack of capacity will not be quickly fixed by S.56.

Another element of S.56 I would like to touch on is Special Accommodations Grants (SAG). These grants are available to child care providers who need additional resources in order to have a child successfully attend their program. These resources can range from wages for direct 1:1 support to materials, training or equipment.

The Child Development Division has made some positive changes to the process to apply for these funds, and further refinement would allow the program to meet its intended goal of providing time-sensitive supports to allow children to remain in childcare settings. This program is vital as an antidote to children getting kicked out of programs because there is not an appropriate level of support.

The increased funding has also been very important because the demand for the resource has historically been much greater than the resources available. The current monthly rolling application

process is helpful, as well as the online applications form. Adding a 12-month option for funding grant requests, as has been suggested by Let's Grow Kids, in addition to the existing 3- and 6-month funding options is worth considering.

Connecting it with the Specialized Child Care Coordinator and thus to Children's Integrated Services will help make it more robust. Previously the SAG applications went through the SCC Coordinator so they had a sense of which providers were applying and could offer support or resources. The direct application is more efficient but leaves the SCC Coordinator out of the loop.

My suggested changes to the language about the study of SAG in S.56, which is in Section 14 of the version that passed the Senate, are:

- 1) use language like "improve the responsiveness" or "effectiveness of the application process" instead of just "streamline" to describe what you are looking for in terms of possible changes to SAG, and
- 2) include language in that section that makes it clear that the Legislature would like CDD to actively engage stakeholders while conducting the requested study, to include a full range of ideas about how to improve the program.

There is a lot more to unpack about S.56, but those are the highlights from the elements related to the work of CCCSAs from my perspective.