

Budget Testimony 2023: Parent Child Center Network

Good evening. My name is Heather Wilson. I live and work in St. Albans and I am here to speak on behalf of the Parent Child Center Network, which I have worked for since 2008. Our network is seeking an increase to the Parent Child Center Integrated Grant of \$5.2 million, for a total of \$10 million.

Many legislators are aware of Parent Child Centers, and we thank you for your growing support of our network. PCCs were established by Vermont statute in the 1980s and have grown to 15 centers providing valuable services available to all families with young children. Our centers experienced decades of underfunding- decades- meaning we still have a long way to go toward being able to pay our staff the wages they deserve and provide the benefits they need.

At my center in St. Albans, I'm constantly reminded of the reasons why we need help from you. My team has been understaffed since October 2021, with multiple vacancies I have been unable to fill. I have only two home visitors to provide mental health services to families in both Franklin and Grand Isle counties. We struggle to offer the compensation that takes into account the educational requirements and demands of our work. We have a long waiting list and families voice their frustration. Will we be able to help in six months? Or in 9 months? There are childcare emergencies, but we don't always have the capacity to respond. Children are expelled, which causes ripple effects on the whole family. The families that are not on our waiting list have been impacted by staff turnover. The foundation of our work is relationships, and progress is jeopardized when families must start over with someone new every time an employee leaves, and this has happened repeatedly.

To support families, Vermont should continue its investment in the Parent Child Center Network. The increase of an additional \$5.2 million dollars to the PCC Integrated Grant will support our ability to recruit and retain an excellent workforce that is stable for families, and able to provide high quality service to the state.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Heather Wilson

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