

March 26th, 2024

Testimony to Senate Health and Welfare
Parent Child Centers

My name is Josh Miller and I am the Executive Director of the Janet S. Munt Family Room, a Parent Child Center in the Old North End of Burlington. Thank you for all of the support the State has given us to support families and to increase wages of our hard working staff. You have made a huge difference in what we have been able to provide in supporting families. The passing of Act 150 was a huge accomplishment for the Network because we know it will strengthen us as a Network and will also better support individual Centers. We are also excited about how it is building a stronger relationship with us and the State and the tasks set before us in helping families get what they need.

The Family Room is located within a Community Center that is accessed by many. We continue to provide the 8 core services we are tasked with and design them to meet the needs of our community. We see 1500 participants annually who use our food/diaper pantry, come to our Clinic for well child visits, fatherhood programs (including Dads Night), large community playgroups, computer literacy and English classes, parenting support groups, preschool, parenting workshops, home visiting, childbirth ed classes, support group for families with children on the Autism Spectrum and our garden program. We are seeing a large number of new arrivals from Congo and Central and South American countries and doing our best to provide them with concrete supports, such as clothes, shoes, winter gear, food and other necessities. We are developing a program to support the Spanish speaking families we are seeing with what we hope is a replicable program supporting workforce development, medical visits for parents, English access and other modules to support their wellness, safety and life skills. We have been able to be flexible and nimble enough to be there for the emergent needs of our community. We are doing this by providing what is needed and partnering with other organizations and agencies to help families build their support networks.

Our Parent Child Center ask is a well thought out and a very necessary ask. Our request for \$721,945 for helping us to support the increase in medical benefits is critical to the health of our staff and organizations. The second half of the request, to support us in building our infrastructure is imperative. All of the Parent Child Centers are doing everything they can to meet the demands of administration, fundraising, support our staff and meet the growing and complex needs of our families. The building of our infrastructure and hiring of an Executive Director will strengthen our Network by better supporting those who are running Centers and handling the many challenges presented to them. It will align our Network to provide more streamlined processes, shared skills and build our capacity. The needs of our families continue to increase with the cost of living in Vermont, the lack of housing, food insecurity and the increase in town and city taxes. As an Executive Director of a PCC, we have been building systems and infrastructure over the past 18 months and it is really making a difference in HOW we support families, train and onboard our staff and how far we can extend our reach to help and hold families and community together. We are prevention focused to save dollars in the long

run, and we are there for families when they need us to respond immediately to life challenges. Please support our ask of \$721,945.