



Date: November 3, 2023
To: Summer Government Accountability Committee
CC: Representative Jessica Brumsted, Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council Member
From: Dr. Morgan Crossman, Executive Director, Building Bright Futures (BBF)
Re: Potential Recommendations for Strengthening Accountability in Vermont's Legislative Process

Building Bright Future's Role in Vermont's Early Childhood System

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont's early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as Vermont's Early Childhood State Advisory Council, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age eight and their families. State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont's early childhood system. The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill. Instead, our role is to convene and elevate the voices of families and early childhood stakeholders; monitor the system by identifying and providing high-quality up-to-date data to inform policy and decision-making.

BBF's Role in Monitoring and Accountability

Within this role, the legislature has named Building Bright Futures as the entity charged with providing accountability and monitoring within Vermont's early childhood system through Title 33 Chapter 46, and more specifically for child care and early childhood education within Act 76. This role, along with BBF's continuous efforts to elevate family and community voice within the legislative process have highlighted a number of potential recommendations Vermont lawmakers could consider when aiming to strengthen government accountability in the state.

Potential Recommendations for Strengthening Accountability

Accountability Measures for New Legislative Proposals

- A process by which current acts, previous legislative proposals, and any relevant data is reviewed before considering new legislation to promote a culture of continuous quality improvement.
- A process by which committees are encouraged to consider whether or not the legislation requires a designated entity that will be named responsible for data collection, monitoring, and reporting back to the legislature on progress associated with the policy change or investment.
 - When charging an entity with these responsibilities, the financial cost associated with these new responsibilities should be considered and added to the total cost of the legislation.

Accountability Measures for Legislatively Mandated Reports, Study Committees, etc.

- A process by which any legislatively mandated reports, study committees, and data are thoroughly reviewed and/or presented to relevant committees.
- A required debrief to discuss: major outcomes and lessons learned from the state-funded and legislatively required work, a review of the investment/cost associated with the effort, and how the work can be used to inform future decision making.



- An individual (legislator or member of the JFO team) who is responsible for ensuring that required reports have been submitted on-time, are delivered to the relevant committees, and are reviewed and discussed in committee meetings.
- Encourage (or require) joint committee meetings to review and debrief legislatively mandated work to provide legislators with a common foundation and maximize efficiencies for those being asked to testify.

Other Considerations for Strengthening Accountability

- When creating a new legislatively mandated study section, commission, work group, etc. a template should be made available that informs (or requires) a certain make-up of members, including a strong emphasis on representing individuals with lived experience relevant to the legislative intent.
- As part of the orientation for new legislators, an overview related to government accountability should be provided including professional development/training related to data-informed decision-making, any procedures for developing a newly mandated body or report, etc.
- Any tools developed to strengthen accountability practices (procedures, templates, checklists, etc.) should be made available in plain language versions to promote accessibility.
- Overall staffing of the state's legislature should also be considered when making recommendations to strengthen accountability. Based on 2021 [research from NCSL](#), Vermont has the 3rd smallest legislative staff during session. Insufficient staffing capacity may limit the legislature's ability to use data to inform policy and implement new accountability procedures.

Thank you for your efforts to strengthen accountability within Vermont's legislative processes. Please be in touch with any questions about either BBF's role related to supporting accountability within Vermont's early childhood system, or the above ideas related to strengthening broader accountability in Vermont

Sincerely,

Morgan K. Crossman, Ph.D., M.A.

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