

Investment Matters: Prevention Works

HHS

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Agenda

- I. Introduction
- II. Prevention Works / Vermont Spending is Upside Down
- III. An Example: Abraxas / West River Haven
- IV. Additional Questions
- V. Sources and Citations / Contact Information

I. Introduction: What is the Office of the Child, Youth, and Family Advocate (OCYFA)?

- We are an independent, non-partisan, state office that engages in individual and systemic advocacy on behalf of children, youth, and families served by DCF, with an emphasis on child welfare and youth justice.
- We are charged with examining systems as a whole and articulating youth-centered systemic reforms that also benefit government.
- “The Office shall: ... provide systemic information concerning child, youth, and family welfare to the public, the Governor, State agencies, legislators, and others, as necessary.” 33 VSA § 3203(5)
- OCYFA “may publicly disclose any patterns of conduct or repeated incidents” if likely to “mitigate a risk posed to the health, safety, and welfare of a child or youth.” 33 VSA § 3209(c)

Introduction: The Challenge of Zero-Sum Budgets

- The subject of today's testimony is challenging.
- The OCYFA is independent. It does not "oversee" DCF. The OCYFA works collaboratively with DCF and all stakeholders.
- "The Office shall advocate for the welfare of children and youths receiving services from the Department directly, or through funds provided by the Department, and those involved in the child protection and juvenile justice systems." 33 VSA § 3202.
- Budgets are moral documents.
- Crisis is not policy.

Summary of Our Testimony

- DCF's proposed prevention cuts, especially those to the Nurturing Parent Program, are a catastrophic mistake.
- DCF proposes to slash some of its most effective and efficient services but seeks significant increases to its acute settings.
- There is a lack of accountability and oversight of the policy, spending, and treatment of children and youth in Vermont's juvenile justice system.
- It is in everyone's interest for downward budgetary pressures to be on acute and locked settings, not on prevention.

II: Prevention Works / Vermont Spending Is Upside Down

- A deep body of research supports the effectiveness of prevention programs in child welfare (see sources page and handout).
- Vermont's GF spending is upside down. Vermont invests minimally in cost-effective programs proven to benefit children and families, and maximally on the most expensive, least effective services and supports.

Vermont Child Welfare Spending, State General Funds		
<u>State General Funds</u>	<u>Sector</u>	<u>Rank Among States</u>
2%	Preventive	4th lowest
1%	Child Protective Services	2nd lowest
72%	Out-of-Home Placements	3rd highest
14%	Adoption & Guardianship	Average - 13th lowest
11%	Older Youth	2nd Highest

The FY27 Budget Exacerbates The Problem

Examples of DCF Proposed Cuts to Prevention Services:

- Post Permanence Program (\$ 293,866)
- Nurturing Parent Program (\$ 194,373)
- FFPSA Prevention Services Cut (\$ 528,415)

Even without federal FFPSA reimbursements, prevention programs are essential to develop and expand.

DCF proposes to spend more than \$14 million on its acute facilities in FY27. Does the Vermont legislature know where that money is going and its impact on children and youth?

Vermont will spend more than \$1.6 million this year on *each* locked bed.

III. An Example: Abraxas / West River Haven

- Sole source contract for five years: 2025-2030. Worth up to \$21.5 million. Contract signed by DCF on 12/16/25.
- On 11/25/25, Pennsylvania Department of Human Services revokes the license of an Abraxas facility in PA for “gross incompetence, negligence, and misconduct in operating the facility” and “failure to report serious incidents involving youth in addition to failure to provide access after repeated requests by investigators.”
- Extensive allegations of systemic abuse against Abraxas.
- How is DCF responding to these allegations? Who provides accountability? How do these allegations impact budget decisions? How do we know children will be safe at West River Haven?

IV. Additional Questions

- What is the basis for DCF's statement on page 112 of its budget document that "Even with the elimination of these funds, DCF is still looking to expand evidence-based prevention services"?
- Has DCF assessed the return on investment of the prevention programs and services it proposes to cut?
- Has DCF assessed the return on investment of the acute programs and services it proposes to expand?
- How much is DCF's proposed permanent locked facility projected to cost, and how does that projected cost break down?
- What is DCF proposing to spend in FY27 to maintain its current data systems? What is it proposing to spend to develop its new system?

V. Sources and Citations

- OCYFA [2025-2026 Annual Report](#)
- Casey Family Programs, "[What do we know about the return on investment in preventing child maltreatment?](#)" August 28, 2020.
- Casey Family Programs, "[Upstream investment in children and families pays off,](#)" September 8, 2020.
- Chapin Hall, "[A Preventable Cost: Economic Burden of Child Maltreatment and Child Welfare Involvement,](#)" June 2024.
- CSG, "[Youth Safety Playbook for States,](#)" 2026.
- DCF: FY2027 [Budget Book](#), FY2027 [Budget Detail Report](#), and "[Operational Costs of Residential Treatment for Youth Report,](#)" 2025.
- VT Digger, "[Vermont hires contractor with troubled record in \\$21.5 million deal for new youth residential program,](#)" January 22, 2026.

Contact Information

- Website: childadvocate.vermont.gov
- Email:
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- Individual Requests for Assistance:
 - 802-828-2828 (leave a message)
 - OCYFA@vermont.gov (shared mailbox)
 - Text to 802-312-1010

Thank you