



Testimony to House Human Service Committee
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On behalf of the [Vermont Parent Child Center Network](#)
October 30, 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about food security and for your attention to this important issue in our communities. My name is Claire Kendall, and I am here on behalf of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network.

The Network represents Vermont's 15 Parent Child Centers (PCCs) which are located throughout the state and provide a range of in-home and community-based services to families with young children. We are funded by the state to deliver 8 Core Services that build family resilience and responsive parenting, support child development, protect against economic hardship, and prevent child maltreatment. In addition, PCCs are partners in Vermont's system of care and provide a range of contracted services for families with young children, including those funded with Medicaid and other federal sources.

First, I wanted to thank you, Madam Chair, and any others who contributed to the effort to ensure that 3SquaresVermont beneficiaries will receive their benefits in November, regardless of the federal government shutdown. The uncertainty about SNAP and many other federal programs is causing a high level of fear amongst the families we serve.

That fear, in turn, makes it more important for all PCCs and our community partners to be there for our families because our services all depend on the trusting relationships that we build. We need them to know they can come to us with their questions and concerns. However, when we cannot access accurate and timely information, it makes it more difficult for us to provide the supports that our families need.

We were all heartened last Thursday and have it confirmed yesterday that a plan had been developed to ensure Vermonters could receive their SNAP/3SVT benefits in November. However, the weeks leading up to today have families worried about whether they will be receiving their benefits. We are hearing directly from families who are scared and confused, receiving recorded messages from DCF telling them they will not receive their food benefits, which thousands of children and families count on to make ends meet. Families cannot simply "stock up" if they don't get benefits in November. Families do not have reserves of food or cash when they are on SNAP/3SVT and other benefits programs. This type of message just causes panic and fear in our community.

As a key part of the system of care for Vermont families, the PCCs are community based partners that want to work with the State in helping families understand government actions and how it impacts them. For many families with very young children, we are the first point of contact and families look to us for guidance and resources.

Children need both nutrition and nurturing in order to grow and to develop appropriately. When their families don't have the food they need or are economically stressed in other ways, they are forced to make decisions on which bills to not pay so that they can pay for food.

Research from the [Stanford Center on Early Childhood's National RAPID survey](#) shows that parents who frequently make choices between which monthly bills to pay report higher levels of stress and anxiety. These conditions make it challenging for parents to provide the attention and nurturing that children need to thrive, and that is crucial during the most rapid period of brain development.

This research also shows that **household experiences of material hardship are significantly associated with decreases in measures of early development.** Children in families that experienced material hardship fall behind in their development. Further, as parents' experiences of material hardship increased, their children's developmental scores decreased, reflecting more negative impacts of material hardship on early development. This is an ominous finding considering the situation we are in as a nation. Babies and their caretakers need every opportunity to thrive.

Economic stability is foundational to meeting basic needs, which are essential for wellbeing and growth of children, especially very young children. The research is clear that economic and material hardship in families is a stressor that can lead to higher risk for child welfare involvement. We work with thousands of families that have a high number of [ACEs](#) and no natural supports or safety nets. We strive to build up the five [Protective Factors](#) in families we work with such as Parental Resiliency and providing Concrete Supports in Times of Need as research shows increases in protective factors reduce rates of child abuse and neglect and leads to better long term outcomes.

Last year the VPCCN served over 20,000 families across the state. We are grateful for the State's support for PCCs and the trust in our proven track record for providing critical services to Vermont's families. PCCs all use a small portion of our integrated grant -- federal CBCAP funds to prevent child maltreatment -- to offer concrete supports directly to families to avert economic hardship (providing food, preventing utilities cut offs and evictions, providing diapers and other essentials to parents).

In addition, PCCs work to ensure that families receive the benefits and services they are eligible for by providing application assistance, advocacy and problem solving -- including language translation. Families are coming to us with back rent due, utility shut off notices and car repair bills that they cannot pay because they need to buy food.

In Washington County, we are working with a family with 7 children, who helped our government as translators in Afghanistan. They rely on government assistance as part of their relocation. Losing hundreds of dollars in food benefits on Oct. 1st because of H.R.1 has the family struggling to find food to feed their family. After having to flee their country to be safe, they are now afraid they will run out of food.

We are also supporting another recently homeless family: single mom, 2 children, who had been living in her car. She has been recently housed and has a history of employment but is barely making ends meet - the loss of 3SquaresVT benefits will hit her household budget, and now she may have to choose between rent or food. With winter coming, families will choose rent which means children and caregivers will be going hungry.

These are just a couple of examples of the families PCCs work with as we buffer families from economic hardship. For this reason, our request is critical and timely. **We are asking to build on our current partnership with the state to first, extend concrete supports to more families, second, increase our staffing to include the role of benefits navigator in each PCC to ensure that families get all of the benefits they are eligible for and remain enrolled, and third, to make sure our own staff can receive a basic wage increase and health benefits to continue this critical work.** Our request for FY2027 is an additional \$1.8 million for our Integrated Grant.

We are looking forward to continuing our longstanding partnership with the state in ensuring that families can access a safety net. The latest report from Annie E. Casey Foundation [Measuring Access to Opportunity in the United States: A 10-Year Update](#) once again validates that safety net programs work and that withdrawing public investment brings serious consequences for child well-being. According to Casey's analysis of the [Supplemental Poverty Measure \(SPM\)](#) (which includes most government support to provide a more accurate measure of financial well-being), over the past 4 years, child poverty in Vermont rose from 7% to 9% as COVID era benefits were removed. In Vermont, 9% means 10,000 children in our state are waking up each day uncertain of whether their needs will be met. The SPM report makes clear that the loss of SNAP benefits could force another 1,000 children into poverty. And taking away other government benefits could raise the child poverty rate to 16%.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your attention to the important matter of food security for families with young children.