

To: House Judiciary Committee  
From: Larry Crist, Exec. Director  
Date: April 29, 2025  
Re: H. 193 testimony

## **H. 193**

### **I. Problem:**

- A. Vermont is not drawing down available federal funds to the degree allowable. The Children's Bureau (Adm. For Children & Families, Dept. of HHS) enables qualifying states to draw down Title IV-E (Social Security Act) funding for a wide variety of efforts to improve the quality and quantity of parent and child representation, including funds for staff training, salaries and interdisciplinary work. Vermont, like most states, would benefit tremendously from these funds, as well as the simultaneous adoption of standards developed by the American Bar Association, U.S. Children's Bureau and the Study of CHINS Case Processing in Vermont (National Center for State Courts, May 2021) so as to enhance our system of legal representation.
- B. Underpinning our current system is Vermont's reliance solely on General Fund. Vermont is missing out on dollar-for-dollar federal matching funds available since 2019. These federal funds are required to flow through the Dept. for Children & Families as the state's statutory child protection agency, and then onto organization(s) providing the services. At present because there are multiple entities involved, there is no single entity with the authority to manage the transition necessary to access these federal funds.

### **II. Solution:**

The Justice for Children Task Force has met, and all agencies agree that an interdisciplinary approach is best, and that we would like to grow this interdisciplinary system here in Vermont, to include coordinated, dedicated attorneys & social service personnel, operating under mandatory training, supervision and meaningful performance measures. Intervention can be prior to Family Court as well as through the Family Court process resulting in:

- A. **Fewer children in state custody:** Less trauma & greater cost savings.

- B. Faster Reunification:** Families reunite more quickly, and children are adopted more quickly when reunification is not possible.
- C. Improved Outcomes:** Complex family needs are addressed thoroughly.
- D. Enhanced Support:** Improved access to resources, and advocacy.
- E. Systemic Change:** Issues are identified and addressed faster system wide.
- F. Cost-Effectiveness:** Faster reunification and improving outcomes can reduce the long-term costs associated with foster care and other interventions.

### **III. What Needs to be Done:**

- Authorization of a Working Group under the auspices of the Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court will be helpful as it creates a platform by which key agencies and stakeholders can come together to begin to tackle the barriers to implementation, including setting up federal drawdown in a manner that will pass federal audit, and not result in financial penalties.
- The working-group to present to the Legislature, by a date certain, program design(s) that establish a system that complies with standards developed by the American Bar Association, U.S. Children's Bureau and the Study of CHINS Case Processing in Vermont (National Center for State Courts, May 2021) and therefore comply with the requirements of the Social Security Act, Title IV-E.

#### **How Interdisciplinary Teams Work:**

- **Early Intervention:** Teams engage prior to, and throughout, Family Court.
- **Collaboration:** Teams work collaboratively to develop a comprehensive understanding of the family's needs and goals.
- **Advocacy:** Attorneys advocate for the rights of parents and children, while social workers provide support and access to resources.

- **Assessment:** Teams conduct thorough assessments of the family.
- **Service Planning:** Teams develop individualized service plans that address the specific needs of the family.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Ensures consistent & improved performance.

## THUMBNAIL VERSION H. 193

### **Problem:**

- Vermont is not drawing down federal funds from the Children's Bureau to the degree allowable. The funds are a dollar-for-dollar match using General Fund (currently being spent) matching new SSA Title IV-E funds to improve parent and child legal representation.
- Vermont's planning has been hampered by the absence of an authority that can coordinate the multiple agencies involved in designing a system that is compliant with federal requirements for the drawdown.
- Current General Fund expenditures are inadequate, absent a federal draw down, to support an improved system.

### **Solution:**

- Authorization of a Working Group, under the auspices of the Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, creates a platform by which key agencies and stakeholders can begin to tackle the barriers to implementation, including setting up federal drawdown in a manner that will pass federal audit, and not result in financial penalties, but will enhance all aspects of our current system.
- C. A model design that incorporates the guidelines and standards identified by the U.S. Children's Bureau, American Bar Association interdisciplinary model of legal representation and the Study of CHINS Case Processing in Vermont (National Center for State Courts, May 2021) so as to enhance our system of legal representation.

- A date certain by which a model, or models, of an enhanced system will be provided to the Legislature for consideration and enactment.

**What Needs to be Done:** Passage of House Bill No. 0193.