



2.12.26 Budget Hearing Testimony

Good afternoon. My name is Margaret Walsh, and I am the Director of the Parent Child Center at Northwestern Counseling and Support Services. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on behalf of Vermont's PCC Network and the families we serve.

The Vermont Parent Child Center Network Budget request is for an increase to the Vermont Parent Child Center Network's Integrated Grant Appropriation by \$1.88 million for a total appropriation of \$8,909,750 for Vermont's 15 Parent Child Centers.

Parent Child Centers are written into Vermont statute as a statewide, coordinated network delivering eight core services to families with young children. One of those services, access to concrete supports, is foundational to all the others. Concrete supports are defined in statute as *community services and resources that address immediate family needs and contribute to long-term wellbeing*.

Locally and as a statewide Network, we are seeing a clear and measurable increase in need. Across the state, requests for PCC based concrete supports have increased 28% in the past year.

At NCSS, funding for concrete supports is used to prevent evictions and utility shutoffs, provide essential clothing, support transportation for children with complex medical needs, and stabilize families before challenges escalate. Research consistently shows that material hardship increases parental stress and negatively impacts early childhood development, while access to concrete supports reduces risk factors for maltreatment and improves long term outcomes.

Our staff are currently supporting a single mother of three who lost her housing last fall. Since then, she and her children have experienced homelessness and multiple hotel placements. Throughout this time, our PCC has provided both trusted case management and concrete supports, which helped to meet her family's basic needs, reduce stress, and maintain stability during an incredibly uncertain time. Had they gone without the support, this family would have faced far greater risk. I'm pleased to share that she is now at the top of a waitlist for permanent housing.

For these reasons, I urge you to increase the Parent Child Center Network's Integrated Grant by \$1.88 million, for a total of \$8,909,750. Thank you for your time.

Margaret Walsh