

**Nicole Sener, Executive Director of Milton Family Community Center**  
**Testimony to Senate Health & Welfare Committee**  
**April 11, 2025**  
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Nicole Sener and I am the Executive Director of Milton Family Community Center, one of the 15 state-designated parent child centers focused on Strengthening Families in Vermont. I am also the mother of two young children, and one of the many millions of Americans who has been directly impacted by a family member's addiction to tobacco.

***It is with my personal story, and the incredibly impactful work we do at the Vermont Parent Child Centers in mind that brings me here to advocate for the Vermont Parent Child Center Network's request to allocate \$500,000 from Tobacco Settlement Funds to be distributed to the 15 Parent Child Centers through the Integrated Grant to implement a range of evidence-based smoking cessation and prevention programming into our 8 core services.***

The PCCN Integrated Grant is the base, core funding for Vermont's 15 Parent Child Centers. The PCC's are established in statute, and are required to offer our 8 core services in all regions of the state. Adding this funding to our base would allow us to make an ongoing commitment to help families with young children quit smoking and vaping and also reduce second-hand smoke around children. We can also use our two-generation approach to help prevent children and youth from beginning to use tobacco products.

When I was 2.5 years old, my mother died from lung cancer. I have just a handful of memories of her, the most salient of which is my older brother who was 5 years old at the time, stealing her cigarettes from her purse and throwing them away. Whether from health impacts on the child from a mother's pregnant smoking and secondhand smoke, or some other related impact on the family, we know cigarettes AND vaping have incredibly harmful impacts on families. The PCCN's proposal has the potential to prevent or reduce the harms of the worst outcomes through targeted health education and prevention activities that would: Reduce the number of pregnant and parenting adults who use tobacco products, Prevent parents and other household members from future smoking and vaping, and Protect children from the detrimental effects of secondhand smoke in the home, and in places where they learn and play.

Vermont ranks 6th worst in the country in rates of smoking in pregnancy. 13% of all births were affected by cigarette use in Vermont. At our Center in Milton, we serve individuals impacted and exposed to first and second-hand smoke in our food shelf, childcare, and across all other programs. How to talk to friends or family about vaping near their children is quickly becoming a common parenting topic. School aged youth in our afterschool program have shared their perspectives, comments, and unsuccessful attempts in convincing their family member to quit. Teen leaders that volunteer with us share stories of students caught vaping in school and the peer pressure they face to join in. For all of these scenarios and beyond, PCC staff are able to lean into the key role they play in strengthening and supporting our communities' children and families and are aware of the serious and negative health consequences for all persons affected by smoking and vaping tobacco.

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In 2024, our network of centers reached over 21,000 children, and over 18,000 caregivers across all geographic areas and programs that include but aren't limited to accessing food, diapers, safe housing, referrals for specialized support for children with special needs, strategies for coping with stress, information about child development, information about safe discipline for children, and coaching through 1-1 visits and support groups. Our deeply relational, and multi-generational approach prioritizes the needs of our most vulnerable families and gives kids what they need to thrive. A strategy that we believe strongly supports cessation work, and would allow us to reach an anticipated 3,000 individuals with this increased base funding.

We have already met with the Department of Health team who leads the state's tobacco cessation activities to discuss partnership and collaboration around resources, training and referrals of pregnant and parenting smokers. The DOH team noted the critical role that the social supports and touch points that PCCs provide in increasing success rates and expressed an interest in the PCC's partnership. Furthermore, several regional partners doing local substance misuse prevention work like United Way, Flavor Hooks Kids, and more have shared excitement to deepen this work in partnership with their local PCC.

The parent child center approach is to partner WITH families to identify and build upon their strengths. This leads to parents and caregivers who advocate for themselves and others, set and meet their own goals, and come to be resources for others. This peer support is crucial to many families, and expands the reach and impact of PCC's – and is also a clearly evidence-based marker in substance cessation programs.

In closing, I urge you to ***please support the PCCN request for*** \$500,000 from the Tobacco Settlement fund to be distributed to the 15 Parent Child Centers (PCC's) through the Integrated Grant to serve families with young children prenatal to age 8 throughout the State to implement a range of evidence-based smoking and vaping cessation activities.

Thank you for your time, and continued dedication to Vermont families.