



April 11.2025

Dear Senate Health and Welfare Committee:

DULCE (Developmental Understanding and Legal Collaboration for Everyone) supports babies 0-6 months and their caregivers and is a universal, evidence-based pediatric care model that promotes healthy newborn development, addresses the social needs of families, and fosters community well-being. By introducing a Community Health Worker (Family Specialist) into an Interdisciplinary Team made up of early childhood, health, and legal representatives, DULCE enhances pediatric care and provides crucial support to families during the early stages of child development.

The Family Specialist builds relationships with parents, gaining their trust to screen across 10 key domains: Employment, Food Security, Intimate Partner Violence, Financial Supports, Transportation, Mental Health/Depression, Housing Stability, Housing Health and Safety, Utilities, and Substance Use Disorders. When a screen is positive, the Family Specialist connects families to appropriate resources and services while supporting them as they navigate the challenges of parenting a newborn.

The DULCE model has been rigorously evaluated, with a randomized controlled trial (RCT) conducted at Boston Medical Center between 2010 and 2012. The findings demonstrate that DULCE significantly benefits both children and families. Key outcomes from the study include:

1. Accelerated access to concrete supports.
2. Improved completion rates for well-child visits.
3. Reduced reliance on emergency room care.

The Parent Child Centers who provide the DULCE model include:

- Lund (2 sites)
- Lamoille Family Center
- Northeast Kingdon Community Action

- Northwestern Counseling and Support Services (2)
- Springfield Are Parent Child Center
- The Family Room

Funding for the 8 DULCE sites comes from two entities, including Blueprint and Vermont Department of Health (VDH). Blueprint has not included funding for DULCE beyond June 30, 2025, for the five DULCE sites it has previously financially supported.

Specifically, Blueprint funding provided \$635,000, which will be eliminated, and includes funding for:

- 5 DULCE Family Specialists salaries and benefits
- A MOU between BP and VDH covered the following:
 - 0.5 FTE VDH staff salary, fringe and indirect to manage and implement the program
 - DULCE affiliation and technical assistance
 - Funding to contract with the legal entity, VT Legal Aid for 6 sites
 - Training money for the BP pediatric model training
 - Grants from VDH to PCCs for other components of the program such as: FS and DULCE team training, family engagement, and a small indirect on these items

Blueprint's decision to eliminate funding for DULCE beyond June 30, 2025, jeopardizes the ability to continue this critical work. This will have a direct impact on families in Vermont who are supported by DULCE. VDH is actively working on exploring bridge and sustainable/ongoing funding for DULCE. And while we are grateful for their energy in exploring sources of funding, nothing has been secured at this time. Without securing the \$635,000 in funding, the entire system of the DULCE model in Vermont will be at risk. Some programs may have to close, or significant across-the-board cuts may be imposed on all locations. Lund respectfully requests your support in addressing this critical issue in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee.

Respectfully,

Kim Laroche, Director of PCC Services