

To: Senate Health & Welfare Committee
From: Liz Gamache, *President & CEO*, Lund
Date: April 3, 2026



Since becoming Lund's CEO/President last May, I've consistently heard—unsolicited and from multiple adoptive parents—that **post-permanency adoption services are essential to their families' stability and well-being.**

What quickly became clear to me is that adoption does not end with the court decree. **While finalization marks the creation of a new family, it often coincides with profound grief, identity questions, and trauma stemming from separation from birth parents.** Each year, 200–250 children in Vermont's foster care system join "forever families." Many have experienced significant adversity, and their needs can intensify as they grow, especially in adolescence.

Post-permanency adoption services ensure families have somewhere to turn when challenges arise, whether immediately or years later. These supports prevent disruptions, strengthen family bonds, and reduce the likelihood that a child will re-enter foster care or mental health systems. They are both responsive and preventative—helping families stay intact and helping children heal.

"Our friends are great and offer support. However, their experience with their biological children is far different than ours (a kinship foster-to-adoptive placement with traumatic experience). Lund gets it. Being able to speak freely, to be understood and supported has been invaluable to us." — Tammy Russell, Bristol, VT

"Since we began working with the Post Permanency professionals at Lund, we have come to understand that what we are doing is not traditional parenting, it is therapeutic parenting, and what we are experiencing is not what traditional families around us are experiencing in raising children. This validation alone has been a game changer. We are thankful for Lund and credit them with keeping our family whole." — Hannah Manley, Panton, VT

These needs extend beyond traditional adoptions. Kinship and guardianship families—often relatives like grandparents—step in to take on the full parenting role with little preparation, while supporting children coping with trauma or instability. **Post-permanency services are frequently the only structured supports available to help these families remain stable and strong.**

Cuts to post-permanency funding risk destabilizing Vermont families who rely on these services every year. **I urge the Committee to restore funding to FY26 levels so we can continue to keep families strong,** prevent crises, and uphold Vermont's commitment to permanence and stability for children.



Lund Post Permanency Adoption Services: FY27 Funding Cut Impact

Lund is one of Vermont's three statewide providers, in addition to Easterseals Vermont and Northeastern Family Institute, VT (NFIVT), of post permanency support for adoptive families and guardianship families. These services stabilize placements, prevent disruptions, and reduce long-term system costs. A significant reduction in the Medicaid portion of the **Governor's Proposed FY27** budget jeopardizes the availability and reach of these essential supports.

THE SITUATION FOR LUND:

- **Current FY26 Medicaid funding:** up to \$575,916.52
- **Estimated FY27 Medicaid funding:** up to \$429,128.07
- **Total reduction:** \$146,788.45 (**25.5% decrease**)

This reduction directly impacts services for: **DCF adoptive families, guardianship families, and private adoptive families.**

Additionally: **Private adoption services** could be supported through **Title IV-B** at up to **\$59,522.55**, but **IV-B reimbursement rates are substantially lower** than Medicaid rates and cannot compensate for the gap.

WHY THIS MATTERS: Lund's statewide post permanency program is a cornerstone of Vermont's child welfare continuum. Consistent levels of funding are critical to:

- keeping adoptive and guardianship placements intact
- ensuring children have stable, permanent homes
- reducing long-term state expenditures in mental health, education, and child welfare

A 25% reduction undermines **the stability of hundreds of Vermont families** who rely on these supports every year.

Expected impacts of this funding reduction include: **increased waitlists** for families to access this support, **shortened duration** of services, and **greater pressure on the DCF and Mental Health System.**

REQUEST: our ask is two-fold:

- **Restore Medicaid funding to FY26 levels** to maintain current service capacity.
- **Ensure predictable and adequate support** for Vermont's adoptive and guardianship families.

As we have demonstrated throughout the years, Post Adoption services are vital to maintaining health in our communities as well as the mental health and well-being of one of our most vulnerable demographics, children who have experienced early trauma and abuse. Investing in post permanency support prevents crises, preserves families, and promotes healthier outcomes for Vermont's children.

The support of the legislature has been critical to supporting Lund's effective and deeply respected work with youth in foster care and families joined by adoption and guardianship.

Thank You!

Written Testimony in Support of Restoring Funding for Post Permanency Services

Submitted by: Karen Stewart, Adoptive Parent

Our Family's Experience with Post-Permanency Services

Our family received post permanency services when we adopted our second child who we fostered from six weeks old. She became a permanent family member when she was 18 months old. Lund supported us through the adoption process just as they had supported us with our first child who was a private adoption. From the beginning, Lund was there, answering questions about the post adoption contact agreement (PACA) because our daughter's birthmother relinquished her parental rights saving months of DCF support and hours of hearings in the courts. Lund's post permanency counselor, Anna Mumford worked with our family for five years helping us understand developmental trauma, link us with NFI to receive family counseling services and connecting us with critical training on trauma-informed parenting through the Howard Center.

How Specialized Support Helps Families Navigate Complex Needs

Our daughter has multiple special needs which creates a complex life for both her and our family system. **Without the Post Permanency advice and connections, we would have floundered in the school system and in the community to try and get the services needed to support her developmental trauma, her intellectual disabilities, her ADHD and her genetic conditions.** Our post permanency counselor attended confusing IEP meetings with us, coached us on which questions to ask and how to advocate for our daughter's educational needs.

Our post permanency counselor identified available slots in the mental health care field and got us connected to NFI for family therapy, a service which has been life saving for our family.

Post Permanency provided guidance and worked with our pediatric primary care to get our daughter assessed for ADHD and to get the genetic screening which revealed missing genetic material directly related to our daughters behavioral and intellectual challenges.

What Aspects of the Program Have Been Most Meaningful

The support Anna provided was reliable, consistent and essential to what we needed for both our daughter and our family. Anna was a partner to our family in a very trying time when we didn't know how to get the help we needed for our daughter.

Why Supporting PPSP is Good Policy

Alcohol abuse is a part of our daughter's birth story, her birth mother's story and her biological grandmother's story. Post Permanency services not only support families with complex needs, but they also address the wider societal and educational issues of children exposed to substances in utero. **The services are not just a perk to Vermont adoptive families; they are necessary for the growing complexity of communities affected by substance abuse.**

In Closing

My comments above tend toward the more difficult parts of raising a child with special needs. I want to step back and paint a different picture. Because of Post Permanency services linking us to other community resources in mental health, education and primary care, we have an 11-year old who is competing in Special Olympics, she won a silver and gold medal in the regional swim meet last October. She spends one day a week at an outdoor educational program where she is happiest learning about nature and science and bugs and creatures. She is supported by a behavioral interventionist at her elementary school and his support helps her stay emotionally and behaviorally regulated so that she can access learning. She is beautiful with blonde hair, piercing blue eyes and a freckled nose.

She has a fantastic sense of humor and she loves her community, most especially she loves her family because **with the Post Permanency support we were able to work on the important things like attachment which helps her feel safe and secure with us. She knows she is loved and that makes all the difference in the world.**

Written Testimony in Support of Restoring Funding for Post Permanency Services

Submitted by: Anna Walls, Adoptive Parent

Thank you for the opportunity to share my family's story and to speak in support of maintaining full funding for Vermont's Post Permanency Support Program (PPSP).

Our Family's Experience with Post Permanency Services

In 2014, I was 27 years old and living with my partner of four years. We were in the early stages of building a life together—figuring out our careers, our finances, and whether we could afford to stay in Vermont long term, let alone grow a family.

Overnight, everything changed.

We received a call that my husband's half-brother's children were going to enter state custody. At the time, one child was just three months old, and the other was five. There was hope that family could step in to support them. With the help of my husband's mother and stepfather, and with critical support from Lund, we worked together to bring these children into our care.

Over the next three years, we navigated an incredibly complex system: visitation schedules, emotional and behavioral challenges, early childhood trauma, school systems, caseworkers, interstate agreements, and court processes. In 2017, we finalized our kinship adoption.

While adoption brought permanence, it did not bring an end to challenges. In many ways, it was just the beginning.

How Specialized Support Helps Families Navigate Complex Needs

As young parents, we were profoundly underprepared for the emotional, behavioral, and systemic challenges that come with kinship adoption—particularly adoption involving trauma, loss, and disrupted early attachments. We were raising children with needs far beyond typical parenting experiences, while also trying to maintain jobs, a marriage, and our own mental health.

This is where post permanency services became essential.

Lund was our first call, and they showed up—consistently and compassionately. Post permanency services helped us:

- Advocate for our children within the education system
- Understand trauma-informed parenting strategies
- Navigate financial stressors and access appropriate supports

- Learn how to work within child-serving systems rather than being overwhelmed by them
- Access and connect with specialized community resources
- Maintain stability at moments when we were close to crisis

These services were not one-time interventions. They were sustained, relationship-based supports that evolved alongside our children’s needs at each new developmental stage.

What Aspects of the Program Have Been Most Meaningful

The most meaningful aspect of post permanency support has been **continuity and relationship**. We were not starting from scratch every time something went wrong. We worked with professionals who understood our family, our children’s history, and the complex realities of kinship adoption.

Lund’s support felt less like a program and more like a lifeline—one grounded in expertise, trust, and deep understanding of adoptive and guardianship families. They reminded us that asking for help did not mean we were failing—it meant we were doing what was necessary to preserve our family.

Even with these services, our journey has been extraordinarily challenging. I can say with certainty that **without post permanency support, I do not believe we would have been able to meet our children’s needs or keep our family stable**.

Why Supporting PPSP Is Good Policy

Post permanency services are not optional supports—they are a critical component of Vermont’s child welfare continuum.

Families like mine step forward to keep children connected to family and community. Without adequate, predictable support, these placements are at risk. When adoptions or guardianships destabilize, the cost—financially and emotionally—falls back on the state through increased involvement in child welfare, mental health systems, special education, and healthcare.

Lund, alongside Easterseals Vermont and Northeastern Family Institute, provides statewide services that:

- Prevent placement disruptions
- Preserve permanent homes
- Reduce long-term system costs
- Support some of Vermont’s most vulnerable children

A 25.5% reduction in Medicaid funding threatens the availability, duration, and timeliness of these services. The consequences—longer waitlists, shorter service durations, and

increased pressure on DCF and the mental health system—are not hypothetical. They will be felt by families across Vermont.

Closing

Investing in post permanency support is an investment in stability, prevention, and long-term fiscal responsibility. It ensures that children who have already endured trauma are not subjected to further disruption—and that families who step up are not left to navigate these challenges alone.

I respectfully urge the legislature to:

- Restore Medicaid funding to FY26 levels
- Ensure predictable, sustainable funding for PPSP

Post permanency services preserved my family. I ask you to help ensure they remain available to the hundreds of Vermont families who need them now and in the future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.