

V E R M O N T

---

# EARLY CHILDHOOD ALLIANCE

The Vermont Early Childhood Alliance is a statewide, independent, advocacy coalition of parents, community members, organizations, businesses and strategic partners committed to improving public policies that impact young children from birth through third grade in the areas of health, safety, food and economic security and early care and education.

*Kelly Ault, Public Engagement Director, [kault@buildingbrightfutures.org](mailto:kault@buildingbrightfutures.org)*

*Lindsay DesLauriers, Interim Director, [lindsay.vtalliance@gmail.com](mailto:lindsay.vtalliance@gmail.com)*

*Lila Shapero, Legislative Advocate, [lilashapero@gmail.com](mailto:lilashapero@gmail.com)*

*[www.vermontearlychildhoodalliance.org](http://www.vermontearlychildhoodalliance.org)*

---

## 2014 Legislative Agenda

### **LEVEL 1 POLICY PRIORITIES**

#### **Increase investment in Vermont's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP)**

**Why:** Fully funded, the CCFAP provides working families with the financial support needed to obtain quality child care. This helps assure family economic stability, while providing young children with early learning opportunities that establish a sturdy foundation for future growth.

#### **Alliance Advocacy Position:**

- Raise the base financial payment for all child care providers to 50% of the current market rate, with the long-term goal of raising the base to 75% of the current year market rate. Continue the tiered reimbursement system for providers who advance in Vermont's Step Ahead Recognition System (STARS).
- Mandate that market and Federal Poverty Level guidelines used to determine payments and eligibility for CCFAP be adjusted annually and kept current.
- Increase the infant/toddler differential.

#### **Expand Quality Early Education for Vermont's Three, Four and Five Year-Old Children**

**Why:** Vermont currently provides quality pre-kindergarten (PreK) learning opportunities to children through a blended delivery system that includes school-based, child care and Head Start programs. Research demonstrates that quality Pre-K provides positive outcomes for children in their cognitive, social, physical and emotional development and in closing achievement gaps for disadvantaged children.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Pass H.270: Access to Publicly Funded Prekindergarten Education, pending in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

## **Invest in Vermont's SStep Ahead Recognition System (STARS)**

**Why:** Quality environments provide lasting benefits for children, including better math, language and social skills as they enter school, and lead to higher earning adults. STARS is Vermont's quality rating system for early care and education programs. Maintaining or advancing within STARS requires annual costs for professional development in order to achieve higher teacher qualifications, as well as involvement in a wide range of best practices that support children and families.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Provide an annual quality differential payment to each provider in STARS beginning in FY2015.

## **Increase Funding and Expand Criteria to Include Home Child Care Providers for Strengthening Families Grants**

**Why:** Strengthening Families grants provides funding to 25 licensed centers in the state that meet quality criteria. Providers must meet STARS levels, provide care to children who receive CCFAP, commit to a wide array of family support services (i.e. access to health and dental, mental health/substance abuse counseling), and ensure that parents have an active voice.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Expand the criteria for Strengthening Families grants to include home child care providers beginning in FY2015.

## **Increase Funding for Professional Development of Child Care Providers**

**Why:** To ensure a quality early care and education system for all children, the workforce must be well-educated, trained and fairly compensated for their work. Smart public investments into the professional development of child care providers create economic opportunities for this important sector of Vermont's workforce.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Permanently dedicate \$100,000 of Vermont's Workforce Education and Training Fund to the early childhood and after school workforce.

## ***LEVEL 2 POLICY PRIORITIES***

### **Address Reach Up “Clock” for Lifetime Limit**

**Why:** In 2013, the Vermont Legislature implemented a 60-month lifetime limit for participation in the Reach Up Program, an income support system for Vermont's most vulnerable parents and children. The legislature started the clock for the lifetime limit when a parent turns 18 years of age. Because young parents need time to finish education and job training while parenting a young child, these changes potentially force work requirements prematurely, leading to serious challenges.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Support the proposal by the Vermont Parent Child Center Network to re-examine the Legislature's 2013 decision to start the 60-month time clock when a young parent receiving Reach Up turns 18 years old.

### **Increase Public Oversight of Vermont's Child Welfare System**

**Why:** An independent Ombudsman Office is critical to ensuring the safety and welfare of Vermont's children. An ombudsman is an impartial public official with authority and responsibility to receive and investigate complaints, as well as to provide the public and policy makers with important information, such as data and recommendations to improve systems.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Pass H.73: An Act Relating to the Office of the Child Advocate, which would support the creation in Vermont of an Office of Child Ombudsmen in FY2015.

### **Restore Funding to Vermont's Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies**

**Why:** Twelve community agencies across Vermont are publicly funded to deliver quality resource and referral services to families and providers within their region. Each agency is responsible for guiding parents through the process of finding and paying for quality child care and supporting the professional development of child care providers through trainings and classes. Restoring a 20% cut from FY2011 is critical to ensuring these services to families and the workforce.

**Advocacy Advocacy Position:** Support the proposal by the Vermont Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies to restore \$200,000 in funding in the FY2015 budget.

### **Increase Funding to Vermont's Parent Child Centers**

**Why:** Fifteen legislatively designated centers across Vermont provide children, youth and families with collaborative services focused on child development and family support. Level funding over the last 20 years has significantly hindered the ability to serve families and communities, leading to fewer playgroups and parent education courses, and limited home visiting services and prevention and early intervention supports.

**Alliance Advocacy Position:** Support the proposal by the Vermont Parent Child Center Network to increase base funding in the FY2015 budget.