

2021 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

The Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance is a statewide coalition of early childhood professionals and providers, parents, organizations, and businesses working together to improve public policies that impact children between birth and age eight and families in the areas of health, safety, food security, economic security, and early care and education.

The Alliance works with allies to support essential programs and direct services, and supports a state budget based on needs, not revenue limitations.

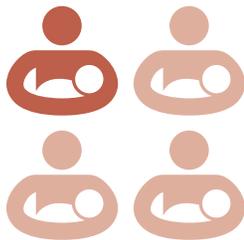
In addition to crafting this annual Legislative Agenda in partnership with early childhood organizations, the Alliance provides year-round advocacy support and facilitates meaningful discussions with policymakers at key times during the decision-making process.

vecaa.org
802-229-4281

a program of the Vermont Community Loan Fund

Create a Statewide Family and Medical Leave Insurance Program

Nearly every working Vermonter at some point will need to take time away from their job to care for or bond with a new child or to deal with a serious personal or family illness. A statewide paid family and personal medical leave insurance program will support the health, well-being, and economic security of Vermont's children and families, and ensure that future generations thrive. The Alliance supports the VT Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FaMLI) Coalition in advocating for passage of a strong, universal, and inclusive bill in 2021.

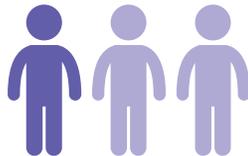


1 in 4

parents who give birth **go back to work** only 10 days after childbirth.

Fund Vermonters Feeding Vermonters to Provide Fresh, Local Food to People Facing Hunger

Nearly 1 in 3 Vermont households has been food insecure since the pandemic began, and households with children are twice as likely to be facing hunger. The state needs a creative solution to ensure that Vermont's bounty of local, fresh food makes it onto the plates of those in need. The Alliance supports the Vermont Foodbank's request for a \$500,000 appropriation to fund Vermonters Feeding Vermonters, a program to purchase locally grown, fresh food directly from Vermont farmers and distributors to share with people facing hunger.



Nearly

1 in 3

Vermont **households have been food insecure** since the pandemic began, and households with children are twice as likely to be facing hunger.

Increase Access to Farm to School and Early Childhood Programming

Vermont Farm to School is a nationally recognized initiative that supports children's healthy development and learning, along with Vermont's economy and communities. In 2017, Act 63, the Farm to School bill, was signed into law allowing both registered and licensed early childhood education providers to be eligible for Vermont Farm to School grants. The Alliance supports Vermont FEED, Hunger Free Vermont, and champion organizations in their efforts to fully fund Farm to School and Early Childhood at \$500,000. Full funding will ensure early childhood education programs and K-3 classrooms can access Farm to School and Early Childhood programming.



91%

of Vermont early childhood educators polled are interested in implementing **Farm to Early Childhood** programming.

Invest in BBF to Build an Integrated, Data-Informed Early Childhood System

Building Bright Futures (BBF) fulfills an essential role as Vermont's early childhood State Advisory Council (SAC), mandated by state and federal statute to uphold the vision and strategic plan for an integrated system. BBF improves the well-being of each and every child and family in Vermont by using evidence to inform policy and bringing voices together to discuss critical challenges and problem-solve. The Alliance supports BBF's request for increased base funding by \$261,000 to adequately support the work of the SAC, Vermont's Early Childhood Action Plan, and 12 Regional Councils required to respond quickly to critical requests from the legislature and public and private community partners.



BBF supports the work of

12 Regional Councils,

the SAC, and 7 Action Plan Committees to bring together **a network of 450+ early childhood leaders.**

Strengthen and Support Parent Child Centers

Parent Child Centers (PCCs) were established in Vermont statute in the late 1990s. Since that time, the PCC Network of providers has become more formalized and has worked to establish consistency and quality in service delivery for families across the state. However, state statute and state funding has not kept up with changes in the Network and the services that PCCs provide. The Alliance supports the PCC Network's effort to pass legislation to formalize statutes and establish clear accountability for PCCs as they deliver essential state services. In addition, the proposed legislation establishes a base funding amount for PCCs that gets closer to covering the actual cost of providing services, plus an annual increase to this base amount.



In FY'20, Vermont's Parent Child Centers served

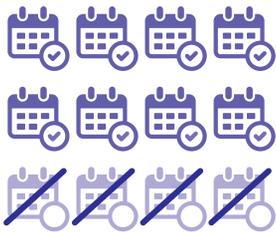
50,000

children, youth, and adults.

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Stabilize Child Care Access for Children with Special Health Needs

Special Accommodation Grants (SAGs) assist early educators in caring for children with special needs. With extra support, children can participate and benefit from high-quality early childhood education, and in turn, their parents are able to work. The Alliance supports the lead organizations' request for \$500,000 for SAGs and to integrate the program more fully with CIS Specialized Child Care. This investment will support the work of early childhood educators and CIS providers, and is in keeping with the state's goal to provide truly integrated services for families.



Current funding for Special Accommodation Grants **runs out 2/3 of the way** through the fiscal year.

Increase Access to Safe, Stable and Affordable Housing for all Children

Safe, stable and affordable housing is essential to children's well-being and success. Housing instability, homelessness, and unsafe housing contribute to childhood trauma, ACEs, and negative outcomes. Increasing state investments in affordable housing, reducing homelessness, and improving the health and safety of rental housing are critical to improving children's outcomes. The Alliance supports the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition in securing full statutory funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, increased rental assistance and supportive services, and statewide housing code enforcement. The state's chronic underfunding of housing needs means we must find equitable new revenue sources, like a proposed tax surcharge on high-end homes.



A record **2,512 people,** including **386 children,** experiencing homelessness were living in motels in the first week of January 2021.

Expand Universal School Meals to All Public Schools

Every student should have access to the same things while at school, whether it's educational opportunities or food. Right now, not every student has access to school breakfast and lunch, and all students need good nutrition to learn well. When schools switch to universal school meals, the social climate in the cafeteria and the entire school shifts as differences in family income become less visible, students are more ready to learn, and school administrators report more positive relationships with students' families. The Alliance supports Hunger Free Vermont's efforts to ensure that every student can eat at school every day by requiring all public schools in Vermont to provide universal school meals as part of a student's education by 2026, and by providing state funding to supplement the federal funding all schools receive.



Universal school meals improve math test scores, an increase equivalent to **up to 10 weeks of extra learning.**

Child Care is Essential

Even before the pandemic, 3 out of 5 of Vermont's youngest children did not have access to the early childhood education they need. In 2021 we will advance legislation to establish state goals for affordability, access, and quality, and lay the foundation of an equitable future early childhood education system by:

- Restructuring CCFAP to cap family co-payments at affordable rates and establish goals for fair compensation for early childhood educators;
- Formally convening experts and stakeholders to develop plans for raising new revenue as well as system coordination and accountability;
- Fully funding an updated IT system critical to effective and efficient administration; and
- Increasing strategic investments in early childhood education workforce development and early childhood education program capacity.



College graduates who earn a bachelor's degree in early childhood education **earn the least of anyone with a college degree in the country.**

Expand the VT Rental Subsidy to Support Reach Up Families

Reach Up, Vermont's basic safety net for children and families with extremely low incomes, does not provide enough income support to prevent material deprivation. Families are receiving less than 40% of what they need for a subsistence living, and even with additional benefits are well below the poverty line. Only about 25% of Reach Up households have Section 8 housing vouchers or reside in project-based subsidized housing, leaving the vast majority with insufficient resources to cover housing, transportation, and other basic living expenses. The Alliance supports the Vermont Reach Up Coalition's effort to secure an expansion of the Vermont Rental Subsidy to provide a housing voucher for every Reach Up household that is homeless or at risk of homelessness.



Only about **25%** of Reach Up households have **subsidized housing.**

Stop the Historic Underfunding of CIS

Children's Integrated Services (CIS) maximizes children's health, development, and learning by providing individualized support to families and specialized childcare programs. Due to inadequate funding over the last 10 years, Vermont is coming up short in meeting its obligation to its youngest learners, particularly those who are entitled to Early Intervention services mandated by federal law. Today children are unable to access early intervention and prevention services with the timeliness and frequency needed for good outcomes. The Alliance supports the lead organizations' efforts to secure an increased investment in CIS, which would ensure continued progress on optimal, healthy child development; family safety and stability; and, young children's access to quality early care and education.



This difference represents an **annual underpayment of \$2.8 million** to the nonprofit agencies providing CIS services.