

# Tips for Talking with Legislators at Early Childhood Day at the Legislature

**Advocates' stories matter.** Legislators want to hear from you! You have an important story and message to share and legislators are interested in what you have to say. Add your personal and/or professional stories to the talking points below. Your individual experience as a professional, parent, provider, etc. provides legislators with real-world context to the issue.

**Legislators are people, too.** Some legislators will quickly understand the issues you present and others will not. Just like you, legislators do not always immediately recognize the nuances of certain issues although they care about them. You can help them understand why your issue is important. Start at the beginning with your story and connect the dots to the policy solution being proposed and the outcomes for children that could be realized.

**Keep your message simple and real.** We've provided you with talking points as a guide, but you should plan on putting them into your own words so that your comments don't sound rehearsed or forced. Avoid acronyms or lingo that legislators may not be familiar with. Also, how you order your comments matters – we suggest you start by describing the goals of the proposal, briefly state the problem, and then move quickly to solutions.

**Legislators make the best lobbyists.** In many cases, the legislators you talk to may not be on the committee that is working most closely on your issue. But it's likely that they have a relationship with one of their colleagues who is well-positioned to impact the issue. Legislators listen to each other – consider asking supportive legislators to talk to other legislators on key committees and asking them to support your issue.

**Listen.** Although you have a message to deliver, listening to a legislator can give you insight into why a legislator does or does not support an issue, what their committee is collectively thinking about an issue, etc. Tune in and listen to what their concerns or thoughts are. Share feedback with the Alliance staff and lead organizations.

**Be a resource.** When you connect with legislators, offer to be a resource to them in the future. If you are willing, share your phone or email and let them know they can contact you if they have questions. If you don't have the answer to their questions, you can work with the Alliance staff and lead organizations to get one.

# Children’s Integrated Services: Protect Family Access to Integrated Support Through CIS

**THE ISSUE AND WHY IT MATTERS:** Children’s Integrated Services (CIS) delivers evidence-based and informed services to families with young children as part of a coordinated continuum of care across multiple types of providers and settings. Thanks to state funding increases over the last two years, the case rate paid to providers is now closer to the actual cost of services. However, CIS referrals are currently increasing statewide, which is creating CIS program budget pressures for FY24.

CIS also lacks a common data system, meaning both the state agencies and providers lack the ability to compare outcomes, track client progress, identify improvements and efficiencies, and make real-time changes to their service plans as needed.

**PROPOSAL:** Secure an increased investment in CIS to support increased demand. In addition, the Alliance supports the proposed one-time investment of \$768,000 to allow three new CIS regions to use a data reporting platform currently in use in the Barre CIS region.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** The Governor’s Recommended FY24 Budget includes a \$951,000 increase in base funding to support an increased CIS caseload. The House Human Services Committee recommended to the House Appropriations Committee that they support that increase. Advocates support this proposal.

The Governor’s Recommended FY24 Budget does not include funding for expanding implementation of a CIS data reporting platform. However, the House Government Operations Committee has recommended to the House Appropriations Committee that they include one-time funding for the data system implementation expansion.

**TODAY’S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Encourage legislators to support the proposed \$951,000 base funding increase for CIS caseload pressures, and the proposed \$768,000 in one-time funding to support the data system expansion. Thank members of the House and Senate committees that have supported CIS this year (and in the past) for their support.

**LEAD ORGANIZATIONS:** Vermont Parent Child Center Network and The Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development

# **Universal School Meals: Confirming the Education Fund as the Permanent Funding Source**

**THE ISSUE:** From March 2020 to June 2022, the federal government made Universal School Meals available to all children in Vermont and around the country as part of their pandemic response. These past three years of Universal School Meals has proven the benefits of the program for students, families, schools, and staff.

The federal waivers supporting the program expired in the summer of 2022. Anticipating this, last year the Legislature passed and the Governor signed Act 151, extending Universal School Meals for the '22-'23 school year and indicating their commitment to continuing to make Universal School Meals available to all Vermont children.

**PROPOSAL:** Ensure that all public schools will be able to permanently provide meals for all children with the cost paid for off the top of the Education Fund.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** The House Agriculture, Food Resiliency, and Forestry Committee recently passed a slightly revised version of H. 165, a bill that would make the Universal School Meals program permanent in Vermont and direct that the costs of school meals not covered by federal funding will be paid for collectively off the top of the Education Fund, rather than in individual school budgets. These revisions are almost entirely technical changes proposed by the Agency of Education, and supported by Hunger Free Vermont. The bill has been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, which is currently considering the funding source for the program. Advocates strongly support the bill.

**TODAY'S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Thank members of the House Agriculture Committee for their strong support, and ask members of the Ways and Means Committee to support funding the program from off the top of the Education Fund. Encourage all legislators to support H. 165.

**LEAD ORGANIZATION:** Hunger Free Vermont

## **PCC Network Integrated Grant: Fully Fund Parent Child Centers**

**THE ISSUE:** 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. Funding for the PCC Network's Integrated Grant was increased last year, but funding levels do not cover the actual cost of providing services.

**PROPOSAL:** Secure base funding for PCCs of \$10 million, an increase of \$5.2 million from the current \$4.8 million in the budget, to cover the actual cost of providing services and address decades of underfunding.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** The Governor's Recommended FY24 Budget does not include a funding increase for the PCC Network. However, the House Human Services Committee has recommended to the House Appropriations Committee that they add \$2 million to the Integrated Grant in base funding to support increases to staff salaries, health benefits costs, and other benefits.

**TODAY'S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Thank members of the House Human Services Committee for their support, and ask members of the Appropriations Committee to support the funding increase. Ask all legislators to support their local PCC by voicing support for the funding request to their Appropriations Committee.

**LEAD ORGANIZATION:** Vermont Parent Child Center Network

## Child Care/ECE: Transforming Child Care

**THE ISSUE:** In the last legislative biennium, the Legislature passed historic legislation that set three goals for the state’s child care system: that every child has access to quality child care; families spend no more than 10% of their income on child care; and early childhood educators are fairly compensated and well supported.

**PROPOSAL:** Based on the work undertaken in the last biennium, in 2023 the Alliance supports the efforts of Let’s Grow Kids and the VT Association for the Education of Young Children in advocating for long-term funding to achieve five priorities that will be phased in over four years:

- **Affordability:** Transform the Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) so that all Vermont families who need it receive support from the state to afford child care
- **Support for Early Childhood Educators:** Increase wages, benefits, and overall support
- **Governance:** Create a single, empowered leader in state government who is charged with overseeing Vermont’s child care and early childhood education system
- **Accessibility:** Support the growth of Vermont’s early childhood education workforce, increase capacity of programs, and ensure that all children have access to a program that best meets their needs
- **Equity:** Through specific programs that support families of color and other people marginalized by systemic inequities in Vermont, increase affordability and support for early childhood educators and child care programs

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** S. 56, a bill that would begin to make the changes needed to the child care system, is scheduled for a vote in the Senate Health and Welfare Committee on ECDL Day – March 15! The bill includes:

- Expansion of CCFAP to help more families afford care and support the sustainability of child care programs
- A plan to improve compensation for early childhood educators, plus retention payments to people working in the field this year
- Changes to government agencies to allow more focus on early childhood education
- A study of options to expand universal Pre-K
- Funding to achieve all of this

Meanwhile, the Governor’s Recommended FY24 Budget proposes an additional \$48 million in base funding for child care. This proposed funding would be an important jumpstart toward the \$279 million needed to fully solve Vermont’s child care crisis as outlined in the [Early Care and Education Financing Study](#). The House Human Services Committee has supported holding this proposed funding as a placeholder for a significant investment in child care in FY24, as discussions about the details of S. 56 continue.

**TODAY’S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Thank members of Senate Health and Welfare for their leadership on child care and ask other Senators to please pass S.56 to make child care affordable for families and ensure early childhood educators are fairly compensated. Ask members of the House of Representatives to advance S.56 when it gets to the House and pass the strongest possible bill to make child care affordable for families and ensure early childhood educators are fairly compensated.

**LEAD ORGANIZATIONS:** Let’s Grow Kids, VT Assoc. for the Education of Young Children

## **Reach Up: Ending Child Poverty is Within our Reach**

**THE ISSUE:** Reach Up is tasked with improving children’s well-being by providing for immediate basic needs, including food, housing, transportation, and clothing. Unfortunately, partial funding has meant that the program continues to fall short of its objectives. Vermont must do more in order to create economic security for families and eliminate the experience of poverty and improve child well-being.

**PROPOSAL:** Eliminate the “ratable reduction” that reduces the Reach Up benefit by about 50%; use current cost of living to create a reasonable base grant; and prioritize permanently affordable housing.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** The House Human Services Committee has recommended to the House Appropriations Committee that the House budget add \$3 million to pay for the cost of moving from a calculation of “basic needs” based on 2019 data to one using 2023 data. This change would result in increased benefits for all Reach Up families. The Committee has also recommended that language be added to the statutes that would make updates to the annual rate automatically take place every year. Advocates strongly support both recommendations.

The House has also passed H. 94, a bill that would require the Administration to develop a plan (and funding model) to eliminate the ratable reduction over the next five years. Advocates strongly support the bill, which they hope will be taken up by the Senate Health and Welfare Committee in the coming weeks.

**TODAY’S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Thank members of the House Human Services Committee for their support of both the funding increase and H. 94, and ask members of the Appropriations Committee to support the funding increase and language change. Ask all legislators to support Reach Up by voicing support for the funding request to their Appropriations Committee. Ask Senators to support H. 94 when it comes up for consideration.

**LEAD ORGANIZATION:** Voices for Vermont’s Children

# **Vermont Diaper Bank: A Sustainable Statewide Solution for Diaper Need**

**THE ISSUE:** The Junior League of Champlain Valley (JLCV) founded their entirely volunteer-run diaper bank in 2018 to provide diapers to low-income Vermont families in Chittenden County. Five years later, the program is now statewide and increased demands have outpaced the organization's ability to administer and organize it effectively. There is no secured funding source for program operations, staffing, storage, transportation, or supplies after June '23.

**PROPOSAL:** Secure base state funding of \$380,000 to support a long-term Vermont Diaper Bank that will work with the existing network of community partners to secure and distribute diapers to low-income Vermont families and alleviate diaper need in the state.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** The Governor's Recommended FY24 Budget does not include funding for a state diaper bank. However, the House Human Services Committee has recommended to the House Appropriations Committee that it consider allocating \$200,000 in one-time funding to the budget for diaper bank operations. Unfortunately, that level of support would neither fund how many diapers are needed to meet the current demand (current costs are about \$212,000) nor the necessary staff to take the place of the volunteers that can no longer run the operation.

**TODAY'S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** While one-time funding would provide some support for the program, on-going base funding is needed to ensure this badly needed resource is available to families in need around the state. Ask members of the House to encourage the House Appropriations Committee to fund the full JLCV request of \$380,000 for FY24. Encourage Senators to support the request when the Senate begins their budget deliberations.

**LEAD ORGANIZATION:** Junior League of Champlain Valley



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

**THE ISSUE:** As a key social determinant of health, safe, stable, and affordable housing is essential to children’s well-being and success. Homelessness, housing instability, and unsafe housing contribute to poor health, childhood trauma and adverse developmental outcomes. Eliminating homelessness and increasing housing security is essential to improving children’s health and well-being.

**PROPOSAL:** Secure full statutory funding for the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB) and \$175 million invested in housing and the preservation of emergency shelter for Vermonters experiencing homelessness, including families with children.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** The FY23 Budget Adjustment Act as passed by the Legislature (but not yet signed by the Governor) includes funding increases to many key programs, including: housing vouchers and subsidies for families experiencing homelessness, the Vermont Housing Improvement Program (VHIP), construction of new affordable housing units and shelter capacity, and the extension of the General Assistance Emergency Housing (GA) program.

The Governor’s Recommended FY24 Budget includes funding to continue several key housing initiatives including: \$15 million for VHIP rental rehabilitation, \$24 million for VHCB for new affordable housing, \$29 million for GA, \$4 million for emergency shelter maintenance and expansion, \$20 million for a new revolving loan fund for middle-income rental housing, \$10 million in the Healthy Homes Program for mobile home community infrastructure, and \$12.8 million for support services for households in GA through the Housing Opportunity Grant Program (HOP).

Advocates believe that these proposals are insufficient to address the state’s crisis of housing and homelessness, and have called for greater investments in permanent, affordable housing.

The House Human Services Committee has recommended increasing funding for GA by \$3 million, and increasing HOP funding by \$2 million. The House General and Housing Committee has sent a recommendation to the House Appropriations Committee to increase the funding to VHCB by \$92.5 million.

Meanwhile, a number of bills that look at policies to enable development of affordable housing and/or eliminate barriers to development of affordable housing are being considered in the Senate (S. 100) and the House (H.68).

**TODAY’S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Thank members of the House Human Services, House General and Housing, and the House and Senate Appropriations Committees for their support of funding to continue to shelter those in need of emergency housing, and for investing in developing much needed affordable housing and expanding shelter capacity in the Budget Adjustment Act.

Looking to the FY24 budget, we ask for legislators’ continued support in addressing the housing crisis by making significant investments in the development of affordable housing and rental units, and going beyond the Governor’s Recommended Budget amount for GA to ensure that no Vermonters are left unsheltered while these investments are realized.

**LEAD ORGANIZATION:** Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition

## **FaMLI: Universal Medical and Family Leave for all Workers**

**THE ISSUE:** 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. However, very few Vermonters have access to parental leave or personal medical leave through their employer. Federal and state laws allow certain eligible employees to take unpaid leave for these purposes, but many cannot afford to take leave when they need it.

**PROPOSAL:** A comprehensive, universal paid family and medical leave insurance program will support the health, well-being, and economic security of Vermont's children and families. Strong families make strong communities and a thriving Vermont. The Family and Medical Leave Insurance (FaMLI) Coalition supports the passage of a publicly overseen insurance program that creates universal paid medical and family leave for all workers and families in Vermont.

**LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:** H.66 was introduced in January by lead sponsors Reps. Kornheiser, Scheu, and Stevens. The House Committee on General and Housing passed a slightly modified version of the bill last month, which advocates strongly support. The bill is now being considered by the House Ways and Means Committee, which is expected to make modest additional adjustments to the bill before sending it to the full House for consideration.

**TODAY'S LEGISLATIVE ASK:** Thank members of the House General & Housing and Ways & Means Committees for their support of H. 66. Ask House members to support the bill as it comes to the full House for consideration, and encourage Senators to support the bill as it is considered by the Senate in coming weeks.

**LEAD ORGANIZATIONS:** Voices for Vermont's Children