

V E R M O N T
EARLY CHILDHOOD
ADVOCACY ALLIANCE

2024 Legislative Agenda

REACH UP: Ending Child Poverty is Within Our Reach

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

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports Voices for Vermont’s Children in their request that the Legislature eliminates the “ratable reduction” that reduces the Reach Up benefit by about 50%; uses current cost of living to create a base Reach Up grant that is adequate; and prioritizes making permanently affordable housing accessible.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Voices for Vermont’s Children for the Vermont Reach Up Coalition

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS: Ensure Access to Safe and Affordable Housing

BACKGROUND: The pandemic and the 2023 flooding illuminated and exacerbated the challenges too many Vermonters face finding and maintaining affordable housing. The crisis is of particular concern for families with young children who are at risk for and are currently experiencing homelessness. Currently, 1,273 households rely on state emergency housing programs (the Pandemic Era Hotel/Motel Transition Program and the traditional General Assistance Emergency Housing Program). At least 196 of these households are families with children. The Hotel/Motel Program is set to end in April, leaving the outdated and more limited General Assistance Program as the only emergency housing option when shelter beds are not available, which will result in many Vermont households without shelter.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports the Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont (HHA V) in its request for the Legislature to do the following:

- Make \$160 million in housing capital available for affordable housing and shelter development and preservation
- Provide full statutory funding of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board through the Property Transfer Tax
- Re-envision the state-run emergency housing system

- Ensure adequate funding for General Assistance emergency housing and households remaining after the end of the Hotel/Motel program (the June Cohort) while any programmatic changes are implemented
- Adequately fund the state programs that provide support and services for households in temporary and permanent housing, with particular attention to housing stability and retention services designed to increase sustainability and prevent homelessness for Vermont families.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Housing & Homelessness Alliance of Vermont

PARENT CHILD CENTER NETWORK INTEGRATED GRANT: Support the Parent Child Center Network

BACKGROUND: The members of the Vermont Parent Child Center Network (PCCN) are currently implementing changes required by an update made to their enabling state statute, which formalized their structure and partnership with the State of Vermont. The changes have brought additional administrative needs, as the PCCN continues this transition. PCCs have also seen significant increases in health insurance costs for their staff.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports PCCN’s effort to secure a base funding increase for PCCs of \$865,000 to cover additional administrative costs, increased personnel costs, and move closer to the actual cost of providing services and avoid a reduction in service levels to our communities.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Vermont Parent Child Center Network

PAID FAMILY & MEDICAL LEAVE: Improving the Health and Well-Being of Vermont Families

BACKGROUND: At some point in their lives, everyone will need to take time away from work to care for themselves or a loved one. Our communities are stronger when Vermont families and businesses can count on paid leave. Paid leave programs increase workforce participation, support healthy and bonded families, and reduce poverty. With paid leave, family caregivers are supported, their loved ones can remain at home where they want to be, and growing families have a strong start.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance will continue to support the Vermont Paid Leave Coalition in advocating for the strong paid medical and family leave program Vermonters need.

LEAD ORGANIZATIONS: AARP Vermont and Voices for Vermont’s Children for the Vermont Paid Leave Coalition

INFORMATION AND REFERRAL: Ensuring a Strong and Accessible Vermont 211 Information and Referral System

BACKGROUND: For many years, nonprofit service providers throughout Vermont have promoted and relied upon Vermont 211 as the one phone number to remember, as the reliable, trusted place where someone will always answer and help people connect with services and referrals. Vermont 211 is supported in large part by state funding through the Department of Children and Families. The program has been level-funded for many years even as the actual cost of running the program has grown significantly. The final FY24 Budget funded only 84% of the needed funding to run the program, with over half of that from one-time funding.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports the allocation of base state funding in FY25 for the Vermont 211 Information and Referral System that allows for full-time service, maintenance of information databases, and capacity to assist the state and municipalities in times of disaster and emergencies. FY24 costs were projected to be \$1.4 million to maintain operations.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Vermont Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance

STATE TAX CREDITS: Expand Vermont Tax Credits to Help Vermonters meet their basic needs

BACKGROUND: Over 10 percent of families with children live in poverty in Vermont, more than three times the percentage of families without children. Across the state, average wages alone don't provide enough for families with children to meet their basic needs. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) are targeted, refundable tax credits, which help qualifying families fill in the gap between incomes and expenses by providing cash when they file their taxes. These credits have been proven to lift families out of poverty, with larger credits providing more substantial benefits. Vermont has been a leader in state-level anti-poverty tax credits, but restrictions on who qualifies as well as systemic barriers to access leave out many Vermont families who would benefit from the credits.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports the efforts of Public Assets Institute and other advocates to expand the Vermont EITC from matching 38% of the federal EITC to 55%, and to expand access to the Vermont EITC and CTC for families with low income who need them most. These changes will reduce poverty, improve family financial stability, and allow Vermonters to meet needs specific to their families.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Public Assets Institute

FAIR SHARE FOR VERMONT: Build a Vermont that Works for Everyone

BACKGROUND: The Governor's Administration and the Legislature currently focus on the amount of revenue expected when building state budgets, instead of the needs of Vermont residents. As a result of this focus on revenue rather than needs, state programs and services are

chronically underfunded. Even as demonstrated needs are increasing, there has been no adjustment to the Vermont personal income tax rates for years. At the same time, wealth and income inequality has grown, resulting in a population of wealthy Vermonters who are able to pay significantly more in taxes than they currently are. The state must raise revenue from those who can afford to pay.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports Fund Vermont’s Future’s “Fair Share for Vermont” Proposal, which would increase the tax rate for Vermont taxpayers earning more than \$500,000. This tax increase will not only generate approximately \$100 million for the state to improve public goods and services but will also demonstrate that raising progressive revenue is possible, paving the way for the Legislature to build a future for all Vermonters based on abundance and prosperity.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Fund Vermont’s Future Campaign

ACCESS TO DOULA COVERAGE: Medicaid coverage for Community Doula Care

BACKGROUND: Doula support is an evidence-based policy with short- and long-term impacts. Providing more access to doulas promotes more equitable, safer, less expensive births, and improves perinatal outcomes in the short- and long-term. Doula care is also correlated with improved infant-parent bonding and less postpartum depression and anxiety throughout the perinatal period.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports the efforts of the Vermont Doula Access Coalition to secure policy changes that will enable Vermont families covered by Medicaid to access the support of a Community Doula, who can provide care and advocacy during the perinatal period that meets the self-determined needs of the birthing person.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Vermont Doula Access Coalition

PERINATAL LOSS: Funding to Expand Peer Support for Pregnancy & Infant Loss

BACKGROUND: There is a clear gap of support for perinatal loss in Vermont. These events include when a baby has died in pregnancy through the first year of infancy. Historically, perinatal loss has been a hidden or disenfranchised grief, and thus not adequately supported by the community. Yet, we know that parents facing perinatal loss are at much greater risk for perinatal mood and anxiety disorders compared to non-bereaved parents. Empty Arms Vermont is the only statewide organization that provides peer support for any family in Vermont facing pregnancy or infant loss.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports the Empty Arms effort to secure \$87,500 for two years (\$175,000 total) in state funding to hire a part-time Executive Director and part-time

Development Administrator so that the organization has the personnel resources and time to further develop its programs and a long-term plan for sustainable funding.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Empty Arms Vermont

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION: Act 76 Implementation: Deliver on the Promise

BACKGROUND: The 2023 Child Care Bill – now Act 76 – makes Vermont's child care system one of the most expansive in the nation. The bill includes long-term, sustainable public funding that will make a difference for years into the future, not just for young children, their families and early childhood educators, but for businesses and our state's economy. On an annual basis, the bill will invest \$125 million into Vermont's child care system. This historic investment will help families to afford care and will help child care programs to improve quality and early childhood educator recruitment and retention by increasing compensation, resources, and professional training.

PROPOSAL: The Alliance supports LGK and VTAEYC in their work to monitor implementation of Act 76 with the goal of making it work for all Vermont families, and to ensure that funding gets into the hands of those who need it most – child care programs and early childhood educators, families and kids.

LEAD ORGANIZATION: Let's Grow Kids (LGK) and Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAEYC)

DATA POINT: Vermont will see \$125 million in new investments every year into its child care system through Act 76