

Voices
for Vermont's Children



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Testimony, Budget Adjustment Act (BAA) - Reach Up

Voices appreciates the opportunity to share our testimony on the BAA. All investments in children, youth, and families matter.

Economic Services/Reach Up

In previous years, the administration's budget adjustment proposal routinely included a negative adjustment for Reach Up. When caseloads were lower than anticipated, the Department for Children and Families swept the unspent funds from the Reach Up budget rather than reinvesting them in income supports for Vermont's most marginalized families, while the program falls far short of providing even a subsistence living. We appreciate the language in the FY22 budget that disallows this practice, even as this year the caseload projection appears to be in line with the budget. Voices plans to monitor the number of participants, grant amounts, one-time disbursements, and other program costs to see the impact of this budget guidance. Voices will advocate for this language to remain in annual budgets until Reach Up has met its statutory requirement to provide for children's immediate basic needs, and there are provisions in place to index family grants to the cost of living annually. Many families are struggling with poverty and deep poverty. As we "measure the success of the system by what is best for children" we can all agree that children are best served when they are assured of secure housing, nutritious food, equitable education, and all of their basic needs are met. We have significant work to do to make Reach Up more effective for children and families, and we look forward to undertaking this with the committee.