

**Vermont Child Poverty Council:
Legislative Update on Council's 2015 Recommendations**

I. Council Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION	LEGISLATIVE ACTION
Encourage the committees of jurisdiction to take testimony on the importance of afterschool programming in mitigating the achievement gap between students from low- and high-income families.	Testimony heard in several committees, including Senate Health & Welfare and House Education.
Require all Vermont agencies and recipients of State funds to share responsibility for addressing child poverty and for improving the financial stability and well-being of Vermont's children.	No known legislative action was taken.
Encourage the General Assembly to continue the work it began last year on establishing dental therapists and requiring employee-earned sick leave by passing S.20 and H.187, respectively.	<p>Act 161 (S.20) establishes a new profession of licensed dental practitioner called a "dental therapist" who is able to perform a limited number of the dental acts that a dentist can perform but is required to practice under a dentist's general supervision pursuant to a collaborative agreement.</p> <p>Act 69 (H.187) requires employers to provide employees with earned sick time that can be used for the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The employee's own illness or injury;• To obtain health care for the employee himself or herself;• To care for a sick or injured family member, including helping to obtain health care, or to accompany a family member to an appointment related to long-term care;• To arrange for social or legal services, or obtain counseling or medical care for the employee himself or herself, or for a family member, who is a victim of domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking; and• To care for a family member "because the school or business where that individual is normally located during the employee's workday is closed for public health or safety reasons."

II. Subcommittee Recommendations

SUBCOMMITTEE	RECOMMENDATION	LEGISLATIVE ACTION
Subcommittee on Housing and Homelessness	Enact H.211, An act relating to establishing a homeless bill of rights and prohibiting discrimination against people without homes	No known legislative action was taken.
Subcommittee on Housing and Homelessness	Support an increase in the funds available to help pay overdue rent owed by individuals at risk of becoming homeless through eviction	There was no change in the amount funded through General Assistance for this type of “back rent” assistance.
Subcommittee on Housing and Homelessness	<p>Adopt and implement recommendations of the Governor’s Council on Pathways from Poverty concerning housing and homelessness, including:</p> <p>a. fully funding the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board;</p> <p>b. transitioning funding from temporary housing in motels to community-based solutions;</p> <p>c. creating incentives for private, for-profit landlords to bring substandard or vacant rental housing up to code; and</p> <p>d. implementing a \$2.00 occupancy fee on lodging, that can be used to support affordable</p>	<p>a. The property transfer tax formula based on the Jan. 2016 forecast for FY17 would have resulted in \$19.3m to VHCB, however, as has been the practice since 2001, the formula was notwithstanding and the allocated amount was \$11.3m. Additional (albeit restricted) funding was provided via the Capital Bill. The net effect was level funding for VHCB.</p> <p>b. There was a net \$1m increase in emergency funding in GA; in addition, \$838k was allocated for the Family Supportive Housing program.</p> <p>c. No known legislative action was taken.</p> <p>d. No known legislative action was taken.</p>

	housing and homelessness prevention.	
Subcommittee on Education	Ensure that 2015 Acts & Resolves No. Act 45, creating the Vermont Universal Children's Higher Education Savings Account Program, has a strong start	While the Education Committees took testimony on universal children's higher education savings accounts, the Committees did not recommend funding the program given budgetary pressure and disappointment that private funding was not available as had been previously discussed
Subcommittee on Education	<p>With regard to school discipline:</p> <p>a. AoE should develop a data system to collect, track, and publicly report on school discipline.</p> <p>b. Solicit testimony from stakeholders concerning school discipline in Vermont, including:</p> <p>i. how schools can reduce exclusionary discipline, increase safety for students and teachers, and improve achievement scores; and</p> <p>ii. how schools can ensure: students' rights, particularly the right to an academic environment free from bullying, hazing, and harassment; family cooperation; and ongoing education for students who must be temporarily excluded.</p>	AoE reported discipline statistics to the Education Committees; testimony included consideration of bills on discipline and bullying. Act 153 directs AoE explore the use of restorative justice regarding school climate and culture, truancy, bullying and harassment, and school discipline.
Subcommittee on Education	Review the report of AoE & AHS work group pertaining to full-service community schools and pursue any recommendations aimed at better integrating education and social services for students and families in schools	No known legislative action was taken. However, a non-legislative pilot between AoE and AHS was initiated.

Subcommittee on Economic Security and Empowerment	<p>Eliminate barriers to employment with safe, affordable child care and transportation options, including:</p> <p>a. Increasing investments in Vermont’s Child Care Financial Assistance Program through increases that raise the base rate and expand eligibility;</p> <p>b. Creating and funding a study on transportation issues for elders, those with disabilities, and the low-income population; and</p> <p>c. Implementing a driver restoration policy and repealing outdated infractions unrelated to driving or safety that may result in driver’s license suspension; implementing “income sensitive” fines; eliminating the license reinstatement fee; and creating a high-risk insurance pool.</p>	<p>a. Act 172 (H.875) added \$1m to the Governor’s recommended funding level to increase the base rate for the Child Care Financial Assistance Program.</p> <p>b. No known legislative action was taken.</p> <p>c. Act 147 (H.571) implements a variety of driver restoration initiatives including a program allowing persons with outstanding traffic violation judgments entered prior to 7.1.2012 to apply to have judgment reduced to \$30.00 and regain their license if reduced judgments are paid and a payment plan is in place for any other unpaid traffic violation judgments.¹</p> <p>Act 158 (H.876) makes several changes to Vermont’s current DUI law, including eliminating “hard” suspension periods prior to eligibility for an ignition interlock restricted driver’s license and requiring the Commissioner of Motor Vehicles to contract only with a manufacturer who agrees to reduce the cost of installing, leasing, and deinstalling ignition interlock devices by at least 50% for persons receiving 3Squares, LIHEAP, or Reach Up benefits.</p>
--	--	--

¹ For more information, see Act Summary No. 147 available at <http://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Documents/2016/Docs/ACTS/ACT147/ACT147%20Act%20Summary.pdf>.

<p>Subcommittee on Economic Security and Empowerment</p>	<p>Stabilize and foster economic security for families on Reach Up (RU) by:</p> <p>a. Increasing RU grants to meet a higher percentage of the standard of need; and</p> <p>b. Restoring the FY 2016 budget reduction of \$125/mo. in RU benefits for families who have a parent receiving disability benefits.</p>	<p>a. While there was no increase, there was significant discussion in the Appropriations Committees about the long-term static state of RU grants.</p> <p>b. \$10 of the \$125 SSI reduction was restored in Act 172 (H.875).</p>
<p>Subcommittee on Economic Security and Empowerment</p>	<p>Focus on the following economic opportunities and “making work pay” initiatives:</p> <p>a. Increase investments in Micro Business and Individual Development Accounts, create a matched savings program with expanded uses, and provide funding for financial coaching, credit repair, and banking program initiatives;</p> <p>b. Support successful employment policies that make “work pay” and help families seek and maintain employment, including: expand the EITC, reduce or eliminate benefit cliffs, and increase income disregards and asset limits; and</p> <p>c. Support passage of H.187, An act relating to absence from work for health care and safety</p>	<p>a. An additional seat representing low-income interests was added to the Financial Literacy Commission.</p> <p>b. Act 172 added \$1m to increase payments to child care providers and restored \$10 of the \$125 SSI reduction implemented in FY16.</p> <p>c. Act 69 passed (for details, see Council recommendations above)</p>

Subcommittee on Economic Security and Empowerment	<p>Maintain and increase funds for energy assistance by:</p> <p>a. Increasing the LIHEAP Fuel Assistance Program;</p> <p>b. Fully funding crisis fuel assistance needs and removing “one grant” restriction to allow two grants for emergency needs.</p> <p>c. Increasing investment in Low Income Weatherization Assistance Program to reduce energy burden on low-income Vermonters.</p>	<p>a. Currently \$1.7m is in the budget for contingencies; additional funds may be available via an E-Board process</p> <p>b. No known legislative action was taken.</p> <p>c. Funding for program was increased to \$11.6m for FY17 (from \$9.1m in FY16).</p>
Subcommittee on Health and Nutrition	<p>Preserve 10% State match earmarked to develop and implement AHS integrated eligibility IT system in Act 26 (2015 capital bill) to enable schools to data match with DCF for calculating eligibility and reimbursement under the universal school meal program</p>	<p>The funding necessary for the integrated eligibility IT system was revised by AHS, but funding was preserved. (Funding is not all 90/10 State-Federal match, but State funds are available for first phase, as promised.)</p>
Subcommittee on Health and Nutrition	<p>Support passage of S.20, An act relating to establishing and regulating dental therapists</p>	<p>Act 161 passed (for details, see Council recommendations above)</p>
Subcommittee on Health and Nutrition	<p>Support passage of H.187, An act relating to absence from work for health care and safety</p>	<p>Act 69 passed (for details, see Council recommendations above)</p>

III. Other Actions

<p>OTHER LEGISLATIVE ACTION OF INTEREST:</p> <p>The Secretary of Commerce and Community Development may annually allocate up to 10 percent of the funding appropriated for the Vermont Training Program to fund work-based learning programs and activities with eligible employers to introduce Vermont students in a middle school, secondary school, career technical education program, or postsecondary school to manufacturers and other regionally significant employers.</p>
