

**3/12/15 House Appropriations Public Hearing Testimony- Regarding DCF/CDD -Waiting For Child Care
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Creating a wait list for child care financial assistance would be a giant step backwards.

The **Child Care Financial Assistance Program is essential to Vermont's economy – it is an Economic Development issue-** as it helps eligible families pay for child care, **allowing families to look for work**, retain work or go to school or training. It improves family stability while supporting children's growth and development through participation in high quality early childhood and after school programs. It provides the economic support working families need so they can enter/stay in the workforce, especially as other cost of living expenses rise. Working Vermonters create economic long-term savings and lead to increased tax revenues, which is critical to solving our state's budget challenges in the future, and strengthens Vermont communities.

Affordable Child Care is directly linked to Child Safety- the connection between the increase in children under 6 coming into DCF custody and the need for safe and affordable child care programs is critical. CCFAP-child care subsidy is a safety net for working class families who can barely make ends meet, a wait list resulting in the loss of assistance in paying for child care can lead to children ending up in sub-standard care. A wait list has the strong potential to turn the curve the wrong way- with families being worse off - increased financial instability is often a contributing factor increased stress, housing and food insecurity and other risk factors such as depression and an increase in substance use as a coping mechanism, resulting in increased child safety concerns as opposed to children being in safe, quality child care programs.

Quality and Safe child care programs are essential to children's healthy development. In the early years, children build brain pathways that form the foundation for all future learning and development. Every year has budget issues and hard choices for legislators to make. **If we EVER want to see a different scenario we have to make different choices.** If we want to increase the quality and compensation for jobs in Vermont, lower the prison population, increase graduation rates and lower special education costs, we have to invest in quality affordable child care, excellent health care for kids and the early intervention supports kids need.

We are asking the State to do something that **moves us forward and to start the process of changing outcomes for the future, or budget gaps and family poverty and child safety concerns will only grow, and the limited resources available will become less and less effective.** Our government needs to stop focusing on cuts that impact those who have suffered the most financially in the last decade.

Points to Consider:

- There used to be a wait list for subsidy years ago-and it did not work for families.
- Many families are already on waiting lists at child care programs, due to capacity issues, and it would be a shame if a family who is in dire need of care – especially DCF involved families- finally got a call about an opening only to have the state tell them they are on a subsidy wait list.
- It would be an added burden on child care centers, destabilizing a desperately needed funding stream, that centers financially can't afford! With an existing shortage of quality child care programs in the state, we can't afford to see good programs close due to a loss of subsidy funding.
- It would prevent families from bettering themselves.
- If we are trying to grow the economy and get people working, how does limiting access to early care and education help? A waiting list brings job growth for low income families to a halt:
 - a single mother cannot accept a job without childcare
 - if she cannot afford childcare, she either cannot accept the job of she goes into the unregulated care system
 - now there is not a safety net for her, and going on state TANF benefits becomes a more viable option than employment, this is not a path towards self-sufficiency

