



Vermont's Child Care Advisory Board

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To: William P. Russell, Chief Counsel

From: Maureen Danielczyk, Jackie Sprague

Date: January 15, 2009

Enclosed is the 2009 Legislative Report from the
Child Care Advisory Board.

CC: Governor James Douglas; Rob Hofmann, Secretary, AHS;
Steve Dale, Commissioner, DCF; K.C. Whiteley, Acting Deputy
Commissioner, DCF; Child Care Advisory Board Members.

The Child Care Advisory Board is a Governor-appointed board charged with advising and assisting the Child Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Human Services. As required by statute, our duties also include submission of an annual report to the Legislature on the status of and needs for improvement to Vermont's child care system. The Child Development Division (CDD) is the state agency charged with improving the well being of Vermont's children by ensuring safe, accessible and quality services are available for every child. When federal funds are provided to states for these purposes, CDD administers such funds.

The Vermont Child Care System: A Shared Responsibility

It costs money to create and sustain a child care environment that promotes healthy brain development. This is a responsibility shared by families, communities, and government. When communities can make quality child care services available to families, they help to lay a solid foundation for a child's social, emotional, communication, physical and intellectual development. Good environments and positive interactions help create optimal brain development. A child with this solid foundation will be an engaged and contributing member of their community and economy.

Child care advocates and parents have worked hard to prop up the system as volunteers and fundraisers, but support falls far short of the need. The current economic recession highlights the weakness of ad hoc private sector efforts as half way through the year communities find their private scholarship funds for needy families exhausted. Many believe that without a commitment to shared responsibility and a coordinated private-public partnership to leverage every effort, the child care system is unsustainable. One encouraging

sign is the \$7.3 million FY 2010 funding increase for the Early Care and Education Initiative proposed in the Governor's budget. Still, the child care system is crumbling.

The Child Care System: A Snapshot*

Number of children served through subsidy/year : 7,500

Number of families served through subsidy/year: 5,100

Number of center and family home providers: 1,850

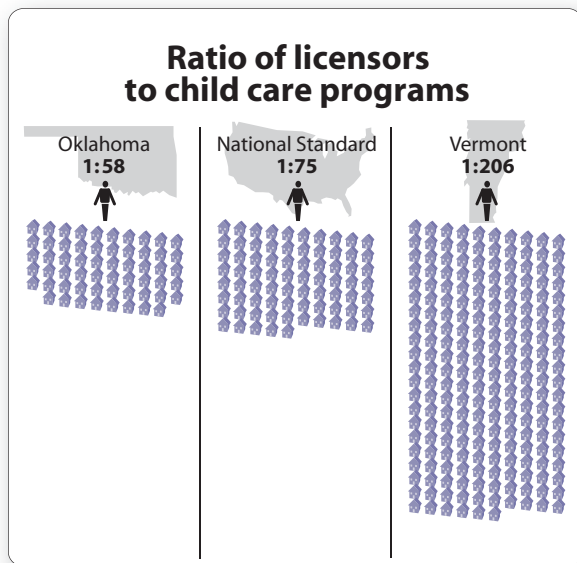
** Estimated annual averages. Numbers vary month by month as families move in or out of subsidy eligibility. Legally exempt child care providers not included.*

Licensing: The Foundation

Licensing is the first line of protection for children in child care programs. **Vermont's current ratio for licensors-to-child care programs represents a dangerous situation that puts children at considerable risk of harm.** The national standard for the licensor-to-child

care programs ratio is 1:75. Vermont's current ratio for centers and family home providers is 1:206. (This ratio does not include legally exempt child care providers, known as LECCs.)

Adequate staffing to implement periodic monitoring inspections is widely recognized as a key component of safety and quality. Oklahoma, a rural state with a significantly higher poverty rate than Vermont, has maintained a licensor-to-child care program ratio of 1:58 for years. Oklahoma now stands among the best in the nation for multiple school readiness measures. Vermont's ratio, while never good, is now deteriorating rapidly. The number of licensors has remained the same as parents struggling in this economic environment increasingly move their children to LECCs — the least expensive and least regulated. Staffing to handle licensing must be adequate, not only to implement periodic monitoring inspections and provider background checks, but also to enable prompt follow-up to complaints against programs.



Sources: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' National Child Care Information Center (NCCIC) and the National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) 2005 Child Care Licensing Study; National Women's Law Center, Lessons from the Military for our Nation Improving Child Care, 2004 A Follow-Up Study.

“Building Bright Futures brings child care centers and the community together in an unbiased way, which means more people are involved in the process. Without BBF's coordination, everything is slower, more fragmented, inefficient.”

~Jody Marquis,
Creative Minds, Children's Center,
Newport Center

Building Bright Futures: A Cornerstone



In Vermont, a cornerstone of the early childhood infrastructure is a public-private partnership known as Building Bright Futures.

As a public-private partnership, Building Bright Futures links community-based planning and program development with a state-level Council charged with creating an integrated system of services for families with children under the age of six. The nineteen-member Building Bright Futures State Council includes the heads of state agencies serving young children as well as business and community leaders. Building Bright Futures evolved from over a decade of dedication and vision, and currently exists under an Executive Order which expires June 30, 2009.

Locally, there are 12 Building Bright Futures regional councils. Their charge is to coordinate regional programs, communicate local gaps in services to the State Council and develop regional plans for coordinated service delivery to address specific Agency of Human Services outcomes for children and families. As the most visible and locally connected representatives of the Building Bright Futures public-private partnership, it is also their role to increase awareness and assist in raising funds.

Regional Building Bright Futures networks serve important roles in implementing Act 62, Prekindergarten Education, and the Agency of Human Services' Children's Integrated Services, (early intervention) program. During its first year of operation as a state and regional public-private partnership, Building Bright Futures attracted more than \$200,000 in support from the Vermont Community Foundation, as well as a commitment to “work with Vermont philanthropic leaders in the field to study needs that can be met with private dollars.”

Yet the State approved a budget reduction plan that eliminated funding for the 12 regional Building Bright Futures councils, effective March 1, 2009, and there are indications the statewide council will be next. To the private sector, the State's premature actions send a chilling message about its reliability and trustworthiness as a partner. **Vermont should be fixing the crumbling foundation of its child care infrastructure — not pick-axing the cornerstone of local public-private partnerships for early care and education.**