
Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing Affordable, High Quality Child Care

Monthly Meeting: June 16, 2016

Fourth Floor Conference Room, 109 State Street, Montpelier VT

Chairman: Charlotte Ancel

Secretary: Jessica Blackman

Quorum Present:

Reeva Murphy, Jessica Gingras, Christine Gibson, Chloe Leary, Rachel Hunter, Donna Bailey, Rebecca Holcombe, Laurel Bongiorno, Michelle Fay, Charlotte Ancel, Paul Dragon

Present via Conference Call:

Paul Behrman

Absent:

Frank Coffi, David Rubel, Steven Lambrecht

Meeting Convened: 10:06

Commission Housekeeping

The meeting opened with Commission members and public members introducing themselves. We then met Tina Chen-Xu and Pamela Burke, from PCG, and heard about PCG's kickoff meeting (they'll be holding bi-weekly status meetings and compiling a list of stakeholders to help them understand Vermont's early childhood landscape). Due to public meeting law, there is no opportunity to have an online forum for discussion between meetings. Lauren Norford, LICSW and coordinator of Early Childhood Services at Rutland Mental Health, will be replacing Melissa Bailey. We received an update of Luke Ahmann's timeline, which outlines tasks to be accomplished by the five remaining Commission meetings.

Decide Dates for Community Forums

The Commission had a lengthy discussion about Public Forums. There was concern around where the meetings would be held, exactly what we would present, and whether the purpose of the public forum was to gather information or get feedback on our recommendations. The Commission was concerned that holding meetings in Burlington, Montpelier, Rutland, Brattleboro, and St. Johnsbury would cover populations that we regularly hear from. Suggested alternatives included Springfield/Hartford, Swanton, the Northeast Kingdom, and holding something at Addison County Field Days. It was suggested that, in addition to public forums, the Commission consider administering a robust survey. The Commission came up with the following questions to be asked at public forums and on any potential survey:

1. What would help you the most with respect to accessing* high-quality early child care?
2. What are the responsibilities of Vermont to help ensure all Vermonters have access to high-quality early child care?
3. What should we do to make accessible, high-quality child care more affordable in Vermont?

**access refers to access based on geography, availability of high-quality early child care, and affordability*

It was decided that public forums will still be held the week of July 25th. A subcommittee will report back on locations by the end of the following week. Members of the community will be asked to respond to 1 of the 3 questions and provided an opportunity to submit written responses to the remaining.

If a survey was to be completed this would be developed after the public forums. The results of the forum would inform drop down menu options for survey respondents to choose from. Questions could also include Likert scale or ranking options.

Discussion of the Basic Needs Budget with Daniel Dickerson

Daniel Dickerson, a fiscal analyst for the Vermont Legislature's Joint Fiscal Office, presented a basic needs budget using livable wage data, designed to show the true cost of living in Vermont and the livable wage needed to sustain that cost. The budget showed that in a household with two parents and two children (ages four and six), child care costs 16% of total income; in a household with one parent and two children (ages four and six), child care costs 19–21% of total income. Dickerson acknowledged the limitations of the budget, that they don't exist in reality and don't represent any families eligible for subsidy. Commissioners were frustrated by the underestimation of childcare costs (no infant or toddler costs were represented). There was some conversation about the Commission's role in determining affordability. Vermont's Basic Needs Budget suggests that roughly 17% of a family's budget go toward childcare costs, where a report by the Institute of Economic Policy suggested it be no more than 10%.

PCG Focusing Exercise

PCG asked each commissioner to respond to questions about each of the Commissions five goals, as outlined in the statute. Commissioners wrote their answers to these questions on the board. PCG reviewed responses to Goal #1 "to determine the total cost of providing equal access to voluntary, high quality, early care and education for all Vermont children, ages birth the five" and pointed out that many commissioners agreed that "equal access means regardless of income", that health and safety were priorities, and that there was room for digging further on what "life success" means. PCG will analyze the results for remaining goals and report back at the next Commission meeting.

Public Comment Period

Ryan Emerson, from Let's Grow Kids, presented the Commission with postcards they collected on Town Meeting Day. Over 2000 postcards were delivered with public stories about childcare in Vermont. They will send us a digital copy to help us comb through the stories and pull out themes.

Meeting Adjourned at: 12:37