



UPDATE: Summary of June 16, 2016 Meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission

In its June meeting, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care (BRC) discussed community forums, the affordability of high-quality child care and Public Consulting Group's (PCG) project to investigate current funding and long-term financing options, and listened to a presentation from Let's Grow Kids on behalf of 2000+ Vermonters.

The meeting opened with an announcement that Lauren Norford would be replacing Melissa Bailey as a business community representative to the commission. Commissioner Norford is currently the coordinator of early childhood mental health services at Rutland Mental Health. Additionally, an updated timeline for the five remaining meetings was shared—planned topics include the affordability of and costing out of high-quality child care, determining funding sources for high-quality child care and preparing the BRC's final report for the Legislature.

The BRC is Coming to a Town Near You

The commissioners discussed a proposed plan to hold community forums in multiple regions of the state (Burlington, Montpelier, Rutland, Brattleboro and St. Johnsbury), acknowledging the need to elicit feedback from the public. Many commissioners expressed concern about the limited geographic reach and economic diversity of the proposed regions. Springfield, Swanton and the Northeast Kingdom were listed as potential regions that would provide unique input from providers, parents, business owners and other community members.

The timing and purpose of these forums was also discussed at length. Ultimately, the commission agreed to schedule the forums for the last week of July to give the public an opportunity to offer suggestions and/or concerns during the planning process. The forums will be led by commissioners in attendance and will be designed to record the public's answers to three questions:

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 with respect to ensuring 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?

In addition, in an effort to reach as many Vermonters as possible, the same questions will be posed to the general public through an online survey managed by PCG. A subgroup was formed to determine locations for the forums and logistics of the online survey, and will report to the full commission early next week. The commission expects to send out public notices of these forums by next week. Let's Grow Kids will make this information available on our website and through other channels as soon as we receive it.

Budgeting for Child Care

In order to inform future discussions of the affordability of high-quality child care in Vermont, the commission heard from Daniel Dickerson, a fiscal analyst for the Vermont Legislature's Joint Fiscal Office. He 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.

In his report, Dickerson acknowledged the limitations of the budget. "Basic needs budgets are all fantasy," Dickerson said. "None of these family configurations are eligible for subsidy. But it's helpful to look at [to see that] people pay a lot of money on everything, especially child care."

Following a discussion on the commission's plan to address the affordability of child care, the commissioners provided their perspectives on each of the BRC's goals as outlined by the governor. PCG will collate this feedback to seek consensus in order to outline their project. They will report on this outline at the July meeting.

Hearing from Vermonters

Let's Grow Kids delivered 2,191 postcards signed by Vermonters to thank the BRC for its important work. The postcards were collected on Town Meeting Day at over 100 polling sites across the state. LGK Field Director Ryan Emerson shared a handful of the hundreds of personal stories from these postcards, which included the challenges Vermont families face, the sacrifices child care providers make and the obstacles Vermont employers encounter while dealing with Vermont's child care challenge.

One such story was from Jackie Masure, who wouldn't be able to afford child care without support from Judy Pransky, her provider who admitted to falling deeper into debt every year in order to pay her staff well. Upon hearing this story, Commissioner Charlotte Ancel closed the meeting with a comment shared with her earlier this year: "We do have subsidized child care right now in the state. It's being subsidized by the providers."

The commission's next meeting will be Thursday, July 21, 10 AM – 12:30 PM in the Fourth Floor Conference Room of the Pavilion Office Building in Montpelier.