

**Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality and Affordable Child Care**  
September 2nd, 2015  
*MEETING MINUTES*

**Meeting Location:** Room 11, State House (Montpelier)

**Commissioners Attending:** Frank Cioffi, David Rubel, Donna Bailey, Mary Burns, Michelle Fay, Christine Gibson, Paul Behrman (by phone), Chloe Learey, Rachel Hunter, Charlotte Ancel, Luke Ahmann, Laurel Bongiorno, Melissa Riegel-Garrett, Jessica Gingras, Reeva Murphey, Paul Dragon, Justin Johnson

**Focus of meeting:** Introductions of: Commissioners, major early childhood care topics, structure of the Commission, and the charge of the Commission as whole over the next 16 months.

**10:07am:** *Meeting Called to Order, Justin Johnson*

**10:07am:** *Commissioner Introductions - See Commissioner Bios*

**10:30am:** *Why are we here? - Justin Johnson*

Justin Johnson set context and welcomed the group. He thanked the Commissioners for coming, and taking the time to participate in the Commission. He reminded the group that Vermont has a solid foundation for a cooperative and coordinated child care system, but the state still faces challenges to make it sustainable and affordable - while also providing the level of quality Vermonters want and expect. He helped set the stage for the next 16 months and began to describe the charge of the group: to grapple with the questions "what does 'quality' mean", and "what is 'affordable'" - he commented that the group needs to look at what Vermont currently does and how that foundation can be built upon - and how does/should Vermont pay for it in the future?

He referenced statute and informed the group that he or his designee is required to serve as Chair of the Commission. He assured the group that while he would be participating in meetings as often as he could that he would like to make sure the Commission has consistency and constant representation. He designated Charlotte Ancel as Chair - and offered Jess Gingras as the person who would serve on the Committee full-time in his place to represent the Governor's Office and the Agency of Administration.

**10:35am:** *Building Bright Futures Presentation, Julie Coffey (Executive Director)*

Julie Coffey, Executive Director of Building Bright Futures (BBF) addressed the group and offered BBF as a resource to the group. Julie described BBF to the group as such: BBF is a quasi-government organization comprised of 23 public sector leaders and private set or leaders. BBF serves a dual role: (1) they serve both as the Governor appointed early childhood state advisory council, and (2) they are the non-profit home to 12 regional councils that act as a state wide early childhood network.

Julie described BBF's "job" as "to harness the power of local communities". She described that they harness that power in three ways: (1) through community - they oversee 12 regional councils that act as, and are, experts in their respect communities, (2) through data: BBF supports the 12 regional centers, parents, and the legislatures through Vermont insights - a comprehensive data tool that is available to the public - offering a plethora of early childhood data, and (3) through policy - BBF has a state advisory council, and their role is to act as the coordinator of "the action plan". In 2013 Governor Shumlin unveiled Vermont's Early Childhood Framework. The framework has 6 goals, and the Blue Ribbon Commission sits within that framework. Julie Coffey informed the group that in 2014 the baton was handed to BBF as the coordinator of Vermont's plan. Many of the strategies in the action plan, have been kicked off by two system service grants: The Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge Grant (ELC) and the Pre-School Expansion Grant. She remind the group that much of Governor Shumlin's framework and action plan lives and thrives through those grants.

She told the group the community, and BBF, are depending on the group to encourage to make bold data-backed decisions and to keep their decisions and recommendations child-focused.

**10:38:** *Let's Grow Kids Presentation, Robyn Freender-Maguire, Campaign Director*

Robyn gave some context for the role that Let's Grow Kids (LGK) plays in the early childhood community. She described LGK as a state-wide public issue campaign that raises awareness about the early years. LGK works with communities around the state to provide education to help achieve quality child care. Robyn informed the Commissioners that when they are out in the field every day they consistently hear a few of the same issues being raised about child care: it is not accessible, it is unaffordable, and they hear about the tough choices providers have to make to provide the quality care that their communities want. She gave insight as to the role businesses have played in the early childhood community: businesses have been drawn to LGK's campaign because they see the stress the employees have trying to navigate the system. She described the system as complicated, but also said "the silver lining is that it is solvable." She continued that

6,000 children in Vermont are born each year - and assured the group that creating high quality affordable care is something Vermont can do - and described the Commission's role in achieving that as "essential".

LGK has 5500 people in their database, and Robyn said that number is growing. LGK sees themselves as being the conduit to provide information about the BRC to their supporters, and also offered help engage the public.

She described how the Administration and Legislature imagined the Blue Ribbon Commission would function: she described three components: (1) through the use of resources that are available - there are a number of organizations who are willing to provide expertise, and there are private funders who are willing to support the funding of the commission. (2) Engaging the Community with the work the BRC does through holding community forums. The Legislature thought it very critical that community members are given the ability to share their stories and their thoughts on potential solutions. Robyn suggested that given the importance of public narrative, part of the process should be holding community forums to encourage engagement and to also put those stories and information collected into the final research piece, and (3) the Commission begins by first understanding the questions that may be asked to support the research being done over the next 16 months. Robyn gave insight to the Blue Ribbon Commission process overall, and suggested that given the amount of research that will need to be done, the Commission hire an outside independent firm to conduct that research.

#### **10:48am - *What We Know About Child Care in Vermont*, Kathleen Patterson, Co-Director of Vermont Insights and Reeva Murphy, Child Development Division**

Kathleen first described Vermont Insights: Vermont Insights is an early childhood reporting system being built in Vermont to bring reliable, relevant and current data to the public (to individuals and groups, like the Commission) so that the information and data is readily available. She showed examples and screen shots of the type of data that can be pulled from Vermont Insights, and showed how the program offers both a regional and statewide view.

Kathleen continued by outlining how the state determines what we know about child care in Vermont and how data is collected. She outlined the "straight forward process" as such: Insights worked with stakeholders across Vermont and looked at what was happening nationally – through that process key questions were developed. The questions (and answers) come from stakeholders, and are used to help identify what they need and what subsequent data is also needed. She described this process and data as continually evolving. Vermont Insights is backed by a data evaluation committee that exists within BBF – that group then connects with the state advisory council and other partners who engaged in a three part process. Once questions are identified, the group "unpacks" those questions to determine what data is needed to answer them - conversations are had with data contributors/stewards throughout the entire process.  
[www.vermontinsights.org](http://www.vermontinsights.org)

Reeva Murphy first discussed and described the landscape in Vermont and the regulations in providing childcare.

Murphy told the group that regulation is the foundation for providing quality care, and described the standards and accreditations that exist in Vermont currently. She described how there was a movement nationally to help the movement of quality - and Step Ahead Recognitions System (STARS) was created. Vermont was early on board in the movement of improving quality, and now Vermont's STARS program is considered one of the more maturely functioning systems.

She gave the group some facts about STARS: STARS is a point based system, and the rates of reimbursement to providers for care are based on the level of quality as determined by that point-based rating system. Through funds from the ELC, the state is ensuring that the tiers of the program (tiers 1-5, with 5 being the highest level of quality standard) are relevant and validated. A year from now there should be a report given to the state about the effectiveness of the STARS program, and that rating system.

Reeva discussed the DEMAND and AFFORDABILITY of child care:

In regards to **demand**: She informed the group that, while VT is still work on ways to clearly measure demand, we know most young children spend a significant amount of time in the care of someone other than their parents. 71% of parents with children under 6 are in the workforce.

#### **In regards to affordability:**

Reeva gave background regarding affordability and how Vermont currently helps families pay for care:

Over 25 years block grants were given to states by the Federal Government. The block grants gave states perimeters in determining what kind of assistance those states give. In Vermont about 46.6\$ million is spent annually on child care assistance - half of that is federal dollars, but only about \$10million is from the block grant referenced. The amount of federal assistance is determined by population. So, about 50% of the \$46.6 is federal money, and the other half is state (and that 50% Vermont contributes is well above what is required). In total, Vermont supports about 8,000 children in the program, those families being supported are under 150% poverty level.

Reeva outlined for the group that high quality benefits development, and there are studies, and data to show this. Vermont needs to work towards creating a more stable delivery system. There is significant amount of research that child care is an economic driver.

**There are 3 major constraints surround the goals of providing a high quality, stable and affordable care.**

1. The cost - the number one cost constraint in Vermont is staffing - especially if you are going to have a stable and fully qualified staff. There are also costs associated with providing a safe and clean place for children, and providing the comprehensive services parents and families want and request.
2. The resources/financial resources and revenues - in the US the number one factor to contributing to revenue generation is parent tuition. Parents pay more than the government or anyone else pays for child care, to the tune of about 75%. So, parent investments are 3x what the state or federal government pays. What parents can afford to pay, is constrained unless there is help (state/federal). There does exist assistance programs (ie: Act 166, there grants programs, and grassroots fundraising that providers participate in).
3. The system capacity & access - what type of care is available, the level of quality, what infrastructure supports that.

Reeva detailed that these three constraints oppose each other, and are reactive when decisions are made.

**11:30am** - Jessica Gingras led the group in an interactive exercise to help develop questions that will assist the Commission in moving forward with their research.

**11:45am - House Keeping Items, Jessica Gingras**

- **Timeline for the Commission:** The Commission ceases to exist on November 1, 2015 - and are required to submit a report to the Legislature on or before then.
- **Role of Staff Person for the Commission:** There are potential private investment funds that will pay for the Commission to hire a Commission Administrator - a part-time, limited service position that will be able to handle the day-to-day operations, help assist Commissioners. This person will likely report to the AOA's office. There will be more about that the next meeting.
- **Expenses:** Per-statute, Commissioners have the ability to be reimbursed for reasonable expenses (ie: mileage) if they wish to be.
- **Importance of Public Input:** It was the intent through the legislative process that the Commission would engaged the public and interested parties to contribute those narratives to the final report. The Commission will discuss public forums in detail at the next meeting.
- **Upcoming meetings:** Jess will follow-up with the Commissioners via email to set the next meeting. At the next meeting a regularly scheduled meeting will be set - location of the meetings will also be discussed.
- **Communication Between Meetings/Minutes Distribution:** Jessica told the group she is looking into a secure and public place for the minutes and documents the Commission both receives and produces can be housed. She has heard from a number of stakeholders volunteering to help with this, and will follow up with the group about it at the next meeting once a location is determined. The minutes will be posted in a timely fashion, and will be available to the public.
- **Rules of being a public body:** The Commission's meetings are all open to the public, meaning anyone can attend. All records and minutes will have to be posted to a public website and notified to the public as well. There does not HAVE to be a public comment period, but Jessica encouraged it to engage the public at meetings and to keep the meetings transparent and open.

**12:30pm: Meeting Adjourned - Jessica Gingras, Charlotte Ancel**