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VERMONT CHILD POVERTY COUNCIL
MINUTES
October 1, 2008

Members Present: Rep. Ann Pugh, Co-chair; Sen. Doug Racine, Co-chair; Sen. Jane Kitchel; Rep. Carolyn Partridge; Donna Bister, WIC Program Director, Vermont Department of Health; Steve Dale, Commissioner, Department for Children and Families; Carlen Finn, Voices for Vermont's Children; Jeff Francis, Executive Director, Vermont Superintendents' Association; Karen Lafayette, Vermont Low Income Advocacy Council; Pat Moulton Powden, Commissioner, Department of Labor; Christopher Curtis, Poverty Law Project, Vermont Legal Aid; Bill Talbott, Acting Commissioner, Department of Education

Members Absent: Sen. Harold Giard, Rep. Janet Ancel

Also present: Dr. Nancy Cauthen, National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University; Robin Lunge, Legislative Council; Administrative staff; and the public

Recording: CD 2008 – 01, 02, 03

Convene and Review 12/6/07, 12/12/07 Meeting Minutes

Sen. Racine convened the meeting. The minutes of 12/6/07 and 12/12/07 were distributed, and the Council decided to vote on the approval of these minutes at the next meeting.

Discussion of Draft Report

Sen. Racine reviewed the process used to develop the current draft report "Improving the Odds for Kids, the Lives of Children in Poverty" and reminded everyone that it is indeed still a draft.

He announced that the State of Vermont has been awarded a grant from the National Governors' Association that will fund a Governors' Summit on Poverty on April 6, 2009 at the statehouse. The work of the Child Poverty Council will be included in the Summit discussions.

The Council then began discussion of the draft report with Robin Lunge of Legislative Council. During the discussion of the Ten Themes section, pregnant and parenting teens, substance abuse, gambling, housing costs, health insurance, and successful programs were mentioned for possible expansion in the report. The Council clarified that its overall goal is to reduce child poverty by one-half at both 100% and 200% of Federal Poverty Level. Also mentioned by Council members were the importance of postsecondary education, interim successes, economic development, renters' rebates, prevention, and energy costs.

Commissioner Dale stated that the main task of the Council is to identify strategies to help prevent poverty and to help create pathways (or superhighways) out of poverty. To create pathways out of poverty it will be necessary to: 1. Look at incentives and disincentives that are currently in place. 2. Ensure there is readiness "to get on the road and move forward." 3. Ensure there are real opportunities available. 4. Ensure there are supports available so people can take advantage of opportunities. 5. Create transitional supports to help people face challenges as they move forward.

Senator Racine suggested that the Commissioner's outline could be the framework for the Council's development of its Next Steps.

Robin will develop the next draft of the report. She will send out a new Energy section and then an entire new draft in hopes the report can be ready for brief discussion if necessary and final approval at the next meeting which will focus on the Council's Next Steps.

Making 'Work Supports' Work

Commissioner Steve Dale introduced Dr. Nancy Cauthen, Deputy Director of the National Center for Children in Poverty which is part of the Mailman School of Public Health at Columbia University. Dr. Cauthen has created instruments to help analyze the relationship of the different poverty-related benefit programs that exist and has been working with the Department for Children and Families to create an instrument to analyze the 'cliff' phenomenon in Vermont.

In a powerpoint presentation, Dr. Cauthen illustrated how Vermont's work supports phase out as family income increases. She explained the Basic Needs Budget Calculator and the Family Resource Simulator on the Center's website (<http://nccp.org/tools/frs/>). Dr. Cauthen will prepare a report of her findings as she completes Phase I of her work with Vermont. Her conclusion so far is that "full-time employment is not necessarily enough to make ends meet in Vermont."

Next Meeting

The Council adjourned at 4:30 p.m. with the date of the next meeting to be determined.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalind Daniels
Committee Assistant
Legislative Council