

june 6, 2019

LT. GOVERNOR ZUCKERMAN NEWSLETTER

JUNE 6, 2019

The 2019 Legislative session has adjourned. Like many of you and many of my colleagues, I too am disappointed we were not able to provide a much-needed raise to tens of thousands of Vermonters by passing a raise in the minimum wage. As I traveled the state for my Town Hall meetings, I repeatedly heard about the struggles too many of our hard-working neighbors are facing. Courageous Vermonters shared their personal stories of outrageous medical bills, difficulty of caring for aging parent/s, transportation challenges and the lack of good paying jobs.

Recently the media has focused on the soap opera of two bills that did not pass. It is important to point out the Legislature did pass important legislation that will have a positive impact on our children, communities, mental health workers, environment, waters and more. Over the next couple of months my newsletters will be looking in depth at some of this legislation, the progress that has been made, and what implementation will mean for Vermont and Vermonters. If there is a particular issue you are interested in learning more about, please let me know.

On the back you will find more information about three investments that directly benefit children and families. The first is additional funding for childcare, the second is an increase in the Reach Up benefit, and finally a program to test for lead in water in all schools and childcare facilities. The legislature allocated over \$4 million to these programs and is committed to supporting our youngest Vermonters and their families.

Over the summer and fall I will continue to travel around the state hosting *'Cookies in the Community'* conversations, town hall meetings, business roundtables, my monthly movies and attending community events and celebrations. I look forward to talking with you and hearing your ideas, challenges and hopes for our state.

Thank you for staying connected.



UPCOMING EVENTS

June 8 10:00AM

Strolling of the Heifers Parade.
Brattleboro

June 12 6:30PM

Legislative Roundup: The state of climate legislation in Vermont. Fletcher Free Library, Burlington

June 14 10:30AM

100th Anniversary of the DMV Celebration. State House Lawn, Montpelier

June 19 6:30PM

Central VT Adult Education Graduation. Pavilion Auditorium, Montpelier

June 20 5:00PM

Guard & Reserve Annual Employer Awards Banquet. Trader Dukes Conference Center, South Burlington

June 24 10:30AM

Lamoille Family Center Visit. 480 Cadys Falls Road, Morristown

June 27 6:30PM

Lt. Governor's Monthly Movie showing *'Almost Sunrise.'* American Legion Post 27, 49 Wilson Rd, Middlebury

For a complete list of events please visit the calendar on our website:
www.LTGov.vermont.gov

FUNDING FOR PARENT CHILD CENTERS

Parent Child Centers (PCCs) are a network of 15 community-based non-profit organizations, serving all of Vermont. PCCs were created through Vermont Statute to provide *“prevention and early intervention services such as parenting, education, support training, referral and related services to prospective parents and families with young children.”* PCCs are essentially the hub of services for families with young children – an place in the local community where families are welcome and can always get the support they need, regardless of economic or family status.

PCC staff wages and benefits are continually 30% below market rates to comparable positions in education and state government. This has created enormous challenges to finding and keeping staff. According to an internal PCC survey, “Over the past three years, across the 15 PCC’s at least 98 people left PCC jobs for higher paying jobs (or jobs with better benefits) with similar duties and at least 20 positions are currently vacant across all PCCs.” **The FY2020 budget that passed the Legislature includes \$1 million in one-time funding to help them raise salaries to comparable levels and an ongoing \$1.3 million increase to their annual Master Grant.**

REACH UP SUPPORT

Reach Up is Vermont’s cash assistance program for very low-income families facing significant barriers to employment. Funded by a combination of federal Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF) block grant and state funds, Reach Up’s purpose is to support adults in moving toward sustainable employment while providing for the basic needs of their children. Vermont’s Reach Up family grants have been frozen in time and haven’t seen an increase in funding since 2004. The current maximum monthly grant for a family of three living outside Chittenden county is \$640/month.

Living in sustained poverty has dramatic long-term consequences for children and when parents expend all their energy to survive, they are unable to meet their other goals. Economic hardship is the most common source of toxic stress for children in Vermont, and the current Reach Up benefit level keeps child participants in deep poverty while their adult caregivers strive to overcome barriers to employment.

The FY2020 budget included a \$1.9 million increase to Reach Up grants so they are now based on the 2008 standard of need. This means the maximum grant for a family of three is now \$700 (\$725 in Chittenden County) a month.

LEAD TESTING IN SCHOOLS

Children can come in contact with lead in many ways. Exposure to even very low levels of lead can slow down growth, development, and learning and can cause behavior problems in children. Many Vermont schools are in older buildings, which means they are more likely to have lead in their plumbing. In 2017, the Vermont Department of Health, Agency of Natural Resources, and the Agency of Education established a collaborative pilot to build the State’s capacity to support schools that test their drinking water for lead and gain insight into how prevalent elevated lead levels in drinking water may be in Vermont schools. Of the 16 schools they tested, all had some lead in their water and five had some locations with lead levels as high as 15ppb (parts per billion).

The Legislature passed the nation’s toughest requirements for lead drinking water testing in schools and childcare facilities, along with a plan to remediate those taps that do not meet the standard. By December 31, 2020 all schools and childcare centers in Vermont must be tested and remediation will be required for any tap that tests above 4ppb.