



Date: February 27, 2024
To: House Committee on Government Operations and Military Affairs
CC: Representative Jessica Brumsted, Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council Member
From: Anna Brouillette, Policy and Program Director, Building Bright Futures (BBF)
Re: H. 702 and Government Accountability

Key Considerations for H. 702

Our experience supporting monitoring and accountability efforts related to Vermont’s early childhood system and recent policy recommendations endorsed by the State Advisory Council suggest that:

- Defining success and selecting measures to track and understand impact of policy change is a complex process, requiring partner engagement and expertise.
- It is key to ensure that those with lived experience relevant to a proposal are consulted and that their role be explicitly named and incorporated into the system or infrastructure that is being created to support monitoring and accountability.
- When committees are aiming to use the work or learning of legislatively-mandated reports, studies, or committees to move forward on a related bill, slowing down and receiving a thorough overview of that work and its findings may be useful. Additionally, the committees of jurisdiction should discuss the way in which previously mandated work is or is not informing a new proposal. The proposed shift in legislative deadlines could support committees in utilizing the work previous legislation has required.
- Committees currently don’t have any specific guidance or requirements around when to designate an entity with duties related to data collection, monitoring, and reporting back to the legislature on a given policy change or investment. Exploring a process or series of guidelines for committees to utilize may support building a culture of accountability and data-driven decision-making throughout the legislative process, rather than isolating this work in a specific committee.
- Overall staffing of the state’s legislature should also be considered when making recommendations to strengthen accountability. Based on [2021 research from NCSL](#), Vermont has the 3rd smallest legislative staff during session. Insufficient staffing capacity may limit the legislature’s ability to use data to inform policy and implement new accountability procedures.

Building Bright Future’s Role in Vermont’s Early Childhood System

Building Bright Futures (BBF) is Vermont’s early childhood public-private partnership charged under Title 33, Chapter 46 and the federal Head Start Act to serve as Vermont’s Early Childhood State Advisory Council, the mechanism used to advise the Governor and legislature on the status of children in the prenatal period through age eight and their families. State statute charges BBF with maintaining and monitoring the vision and strategic plan for Vermont’s early childhood system. The Building Bright Futures State Advisory Council (SAC) does not directly support or oppose any specific proposal or bill. Instead, our role is to convene and elevate the voices of families and early childhood stakeholders;



monitor the system by identifying and providing high-quality up-to-date data to inform policy and decision-making.

BBF's Role in Monitoring and Accountability

The legislature has named Building Bright Futures as the entity charged with providing accountability and monitoring within Vermont's early childhood system through Title 33 Chapter 46, and more recently for new investments and policy changes related to child care and early childhood education within Act 76. Our experience to date in supporting the state and relevant agencies with monitoring implementation and measuring impact for Act 76 has resulted in significant lessons learned about what it could look like to strengthen government accountability practices and support a culture of continuous quality improvement through the state, including for the legislature. With my testimony, I will share more about BBF's role in monitoring Act 76, elevate related policy recommendations on monitoring and accountability made by the BBF State Advisory Council, and then offer some considerations for H.702.

Our Experience in Monitoring Act 76

As we elevated in our annual report to the legislature on [Act 76 Monitoring](#), one key learning of our role has been that no singular indicator (or small list of indicators) is sufficient to measure overall impact. In our role in monitoring and accountability for the law, over the course of several months we held focus groups and conducted surveys to ask partners what success for this law looked like and name the top three things we need to measure to understand its impact. Through this partner engagement, it became apparent that significant variation existed among partners based on their sector, lived experience, and elements of the law they anticipated to be most impactful. Even among legislators whose expertise shaped the bill, every partner held different visions for what success would look like and what data we needed to collect to understand the impact of the law's investments and policy changes.

This partner engagement that Building Bright Future's supported over a series of months resulted in:

- Over 150 indicators identified by partners that could be used as baseline measures of the impact of Act 76 across all areas of legislative intent.
 - Of the over 150 indicators, we only have existing data on approximately one third to support monitoring efforts.
- Of these over 150 indicators, [a snapshot](#) of the most critical data points in understanding the law's impact was developed that through thematic analysis and prioritization resulted in nine themes:
 - Equitable access, experiences of those most impacted, early childhood workforce, affordability, quality, fiscal implications, program stability, economic impact, and child outcomes

This process for a singular, albeit significant, piece of legislation was extensive. The ability of a committee to determine measures for success for a given piece of legislation in isolation is something to further examine.

State Advisory Council Network Recommendations Related to Monitoring and Accountability

[Recent policy recommendations](#) endorsed by the State Advisory Council related to government accountability and the importance of partnering with those with lived experience can also lend lessons to this conversation.



Guidance for Legislatively Mandated Bodies (2024 and 2023)

“Develop and enact a formal guidance/protocol for naming membership when creating new legislatively mandated bodies (study sections, councils, etc.). A membership template must include individuals with relevant and current lived experience. This guidance should also include resources and best practices for holding accessible meetings that are welcoming and inclusive for community and family representatives, as well as considerations for adopting a trauma and resilience-informed lens.”

Make Critical Investments in Data & Technological Infrastructure (2020, 2021, 2024)

Commit to early childhood data integration and governance through sustained funding, dedicated staffing, data infrastructure, and data-driven accountability.

The Complexity of Systems Monitoring and Accountability

Simultaneous to Building Bright Futures efforts to monitor implementation and impact related to Act 76’s significant investments in the state’s child care system, Vermont is also in the midst of implementing a large federal grant to support quality improvement in the early childhood system, called [the Vermont Integration Project: Building Integration in B-5 Early Childhood Systems](#), or the Preschool Development Grant. This grant is bringing over \$7 million dollars a year to the state with activities spanning 5 agencies and organizations.

Despite this large group of partners and their commitment and expertise, it has taken over a year and a dedicated full-time staff member, BBF’s Early Childhood Systems Evaluator, to define measures of success for this grant and to begin to build systems and tools to report on them. This is to say, that building a culture of accountability and data-driven work takes significant time and content-area expertise.

Key Considerations for H. 702

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committees to utilize may support building a culture of accountability and data-driven decision-making throughout the legislative process, rather than isolating this work in a specific committee.

- Overall staffing of the state's legislature should also be considered when making recommendations to strengthen accountability. Based on [2021 research from NCSL](#), Vermont has the 3rd smallest legislative staff during session. Insufficient staffing capacity may limit the legislature's ability to use data to inform policy and implement new accountability procedures.

We are excited to see this Committee and others considering how best to improve the legislature's government accountability systems and practices. Building a culture of accountability and data-driven decision-making has the potential to strengthen the work of the legislature and create more systems to ensure that individuals with lived experience are heard.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anna Brouillette", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Anna Brouillette, Ed.M.

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