



**Testimony: S. 56 An act related to child care and early childhood education
Senate Health & Welfare Committee**

February 17, 2023

Thank you Chair Lyons and members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today.

- For the record my name is Roxanne Vought and I am Executive Director of Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility (or VBSR).
- For over 30 years VBSR has championed business as a force for good.
- We leverage the power of business for positive social and environmental impact through education, networking, and advocacy.
- We have 700 members across the state representing all sectors and geographic regions of Vermont – from sole proprietors to the largest employers in the state.

I recently came across a VBSR policy statement entitled “Child Care – An Escalating Business Issue”

It spoke to many points those in this room are familiar with:

- The neuroscience on birth to 5 and how children who can’t access high quality care are “stalled at the start” in terms of not just educational outcomes, but their ability to thrive as adults
- The impact on employee productivity and therefore business growth when working families can’t access the care they need
- The interrelationship between access, cost, and quality

This VBSR policy statement was written in 2003, twenty years ago.

In 2013, ten years ago, I joined VBSR as a staff member and became aware of the high cost of child care and the lack of infant spots in particular. I spent 4 years planning for the birth of my daughter and still, when she was born, my husband and I juggled two jobs without care for 5 months before we secured one of the coveted infant spots. The day I got the call I was told there was another mother who was also seeking the spot. Whoever got to the center first with a \$50 deposit would get it. I feel fortunate to have been the lucky one, but I am haunted by what happened to this other mother, the one who didn’t have the \$50; who didn’t have the flexibility from her employer to drop work on a moment’s notice.

Now, in 2023, two decades later from VBSR’s first policy statement on child care, we are facing a credible threat to the health of our economy as people are opting out of the workforce, choosing not to have children when they would like to, or choosing to move out of Vermont or not come here because they can’t access the child care they need.

Clearly we have moved beyond “An Escalating Business Issue” to a full blown crisis.

Here are some examples of how this is affecting our VBSR members today, in their own words:

Sam Hooper, President, Vermont Glove in Randolph: “When I look at the barriers to success for Vermont Glove, child care is top of the list. We operate on thin margins. When one employee can’t make it in because of child care, I know it’s going to be a long day and our productivity will suffer. We absolutely must create a child care system that works for every family, as well as our businesses.”

Cara Tobin, Chef & Owner, Honey Road in Burlington: “It was easier to open a restaurant than it was to find child care. And every day my restaurant is impacted by the instability of our child care system.”

I have also heard stories of employers who are considering the painful decision of letting employees go because they are missing too much work due to a lack of reliable child care, a decision made that much more painful given how hard it was to find that worker in the first place. Other employees need to cut work days short because child care programs “don’t have enough staffing today.”

Here is what makes VBSR hopeful:

- S. 56 makes huge strides in moving us to where we need to get to with cost, quality, and access.
- Members of this committee and other leaders are doing heroic work to increase access and affordability in Vermont’s child care and early learning system and we have every confidence in this leadership.
- Families, employers, and providers are committed to overcoming the challenges and willing to do what it takes. Employers are willing to pay into the proposed system if it ensures their workers will have access to care that’s affordable, high-quality, and reliable, when and where families need it.
- Together, we can take advantage of this historic opportunity and get workers back to work.

We applaud the efforts of this committee and appreciate your time today. Thank you.



Roxanne Vought
Executive Director