

To Our Vermont State Legislators:

We are reaching out as the Early Childhood Professionals Network of The Upper Valley, to voice our support and our concerns of the S.56 Bill.

We applaud the support and recognition of the following language in the bill for Early Childhood Educators, their programs, and families. Below are some of the highlights:

- Calculating payments to programs based on the cost of care, inclusive of increased compensation for early childhood educators, instead of market rates
- Expanding eligibility for families up to 450% of the federal poverty level by July 2024.
- Asking DCF to work with Building Bright Futures to establish tiered professional compensation standards for employees in childcare programs by 2024
- Providing staff retention payments to childcare programs, including family child care home providers, in 2023
- Switching to an enrollment-based payment system instead of attendance-based payments
- Having CCFAP subsidy levels determined solely on family income
- Creating a non-citizen child care assistance program for families who are not eligible for CCFAP due to citizenship status
- Creating a new property tax exemption for family child care home programs, as well as for property owners that provide space to child care programs for at least 25% below fair market value
- Providing additional funding for early childhood educator scholarships

While we do feel that there are a lot of good points in the S.56 Bill, we feel there are also some areas that need to be addressed further.

We support the Mixed delivery system that was implemented in 2014 and has been successful, meeting the needs of Vermont's children and families. We cannot afford to move away from this. Keeping in mind that community-based programs can not replace PreK-age children with infants and toddlers. As early childhood educators, we must follow the regulations that mandate ratios, numbers, and needs of the individual children, infants and toddlers.

Moving 4-year-olds to public Pre-K brings up unexpected consequences. Here are a few of our concerns:

- Will the 4 year olds be going on the buses with older children?
- Where do they go before and after school?
- Parents will be required to pay for a full-time slot in programs so their children can maintain enrollment for after school care.
- Where will 4 year olds go during summer vacation?
- How are we going to address the gap in care if the legislative bill passes?

- Currently, there is a very clear gap in care for infants and toddlers.
- The gap will be made even wider as it will now include 4-year-olds.
- Where would the pre-k classrooms be in the school systems and how would they get enough teachers to teach these students?
- Are we prepared to reevaluate playground structures to accommodate the safety needs of our youngest students?
- Will teacher-student ratio requirements change?
- What qualifications would the Pre-K teacher need to have to teach these students?

We believe that the suggested PreK changes mean that private programs could no longer partner with public schools and receive tuition on behalf of the child for UPK services. There are many providers that have furthered, and continue to further their education so that they can be public PreK partners. Licensed teachers are scarce and removing them as PreK partners seems counterintuitive.

- Many families make the choice to keep their child in home-based programs and it feels like we would be removing "choice" for families.
- Per Regulations, Family Home Early Childhood Educators are allowed to enroll 6 children total; 2 under the age of two and 4 children under school age. If the 4 year olds are admitted into a school based pre-K program, will the regulations change to allow care for more under the age of two?
- A real consequence from this bill is that providers may not be able to have full enrollment with infants, toddlers, and three year olds, where will the gap in compensation come from? The likelihood of providers closing their doors is much greater.
- Not all four year olds are developmentally ready for a school setting. They thrive and flourish in an atmosphere where they can develop social and emotional skills.
- Not every early childhood educator is made to teach only infants and toddlers.
 - It would be like telling a lawyer that specializes in family law that they can no longer practice in that field and they all must do real estate law because there is a greater need for it.

Vermont has been applauded for including 3-year-olds in its UPK program because of the benefits to children. Many states are trying to move in this direction. Why was this change included in the bill?

Final thoughts include the question of the changes that do not align with recommendations from the Vermont Child Care and Early Childhood Education Systems Analysis study that was commissioned by the Legislature and released last year. Separating the administration/functions currently overseen by DCF into 2 different agencies including a new dept of Economic Empowerment—and creating a new Secretary of ECE and Special Education position in AOE. Oversight functions would be administered by 3 agencies—each in charge of different aspects. We feel this recommendation will lead to more confusion, more overlap, and

more work for educators. Our understanding is that educators spoke clearly and the study reported that one agency for all "Early Childhood Education" would be best.

Thank you for your time and commitment to improving access to high quality early childhood education programs and the educators who serve in their communities.

Early Childhood Professionals Network of the Upper Valley

Tammie Hazlett-Thetford
Jen Tucker-White River
Kelly Garcia-White River
Sherry Boudro-Windsor
Carlene Lyons-White River
Shelia Hathorn-White River
Holly Cole- Springfield
Apryl Blake-Ascutney
Ariel Rose- Springfield
Chelsea Chase-Springfield
Belinda Snow-Gifford- Brookfield
Carrie Wright-Randolph
Dawna Slarve- Hartland
Denise Perry-White River
Dominique Lafond-Washington
Holly Rheaume-Ascutney
Elizabeth Roberts-Perkinsville
Julie Breault-Bridgewater
Kristy Kimball-South Royalton
Thembi Mulhuri-White River
Emily Pryer-Bradford
Sheila Roby-Springfield