

Thank you for the opportunity to provide thoughts about the portion of S 56 that addresses the childcare needs of non-citizen children.

I am Cheryl Mitchell from the town of New Haven. My family have been farming here for close to half a century and I have been working in human services, health, and education for most of that time. I applaud you for working so hard to improve the lives of children, families, communities, and the economy in Vermont. With a few changes, S. 56 has the potential to make a huge impact.

RE: the section on non-citizen children. There are currently about 2,600 non-citizen children in Vermont. These families (who make up about 5 % of the Vermont population), may have emigrated from other countries, be part of a refugee resettlement program or live here doing migrant labor. Most of them can live and work here freely, but those who keep the dairy industry alive are not afforded the protection of documented status.

<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-vermont>

There are different rules for the Federal Programs that fund early care and education. Head Start and the public schools are available to all families, regardless of the citizen status of children or parents. But the Child Development Block Grant (the major Federal Funding stream for Vermont's CCFAP - Child Care Financial Assistance Program - is considered a public benefit program and thus requires stricter eligibility determination.

<https://www.clasp.org/sites/default/files/public/resources-and-publications/publication-1/Immigrant-Eligibility-for-ECE-Programs.pdf>

Many of the parents of young children are afraid to enroll their children in programs that would greatly benefit the child's language development, comfort with Vermont culture, and socialization. Some parents are afraid because they worry what would happen if the child were away from home and the mother or father was seized by ICE and deported. Some are afraid that the application process is too difficult. (I am guessing that your committee members have all tried filling out the CCFAP application in a situation where your internet connection was not stable? So, you can relate to this concern.) Some are worried because they don't have Social Security Numbers and providing any documentation will make them more vulnerable. Many of these workers have applied for ITINs (Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers) but that is not the same as a Social Security Number.

The proposed special program would likely not involve very many children (it would be similar to the Vermont funded program that was implemented to allow parents on TANF to attend college). However, you might be able to achieve the same ends by simply requiring DCF (Department of Children and Families) to revise their eligibility protocols to assure that non-citizen children and children of non-citizen parents are categorically eligible for full CCFAP funding. I would be happy to provide case studies of several families for whom such a change would be amazingly wonderful.

