

## Alexander McCracken

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**From:** Donna Bailey <dbailey@addisoncountypcc.org>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 21, 2023 2:35 PM  
**To:** Ruth Hardy; Martine L. Gulick; Virginia Lyons; David Weeks; Terry K. Williams; Alexander McCracken  
**Subject:** [External] S 56 bill response

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Senate Health and Welfare Committee  
February 21, 2023

Dear Committee:

The following is on behalf of the Parent Child Center Network, in response to S 56.

Thank you:

Thanks to the Senators and Representatives for putting forth a bill for child care. These legislators are strong advocates for children and families in Vermont and we are lucky they are proposing legislation to help children access and maintain high quality care. We thank you for a bill that addresses child care funding, equity, and access.

Plusses of the bill:

Providers appreciate the increased subsidy, support for home providers, and inclusion of people who are not citizens. We like eliminating the market rate as the means to establish rates and we support creating a subsidy that will increase with the cost of living. We truly appreciate a permanent system to keep child care payments based on enrollment, instead of on attendance. These proposals help the early childhood community stay afloat and prosper as a profession, which in turn helps families have dependable access to affordable, quality child care.

## Concerns about the impact of the bill:

Mixed delivery is working: The idea that the mixed stream of delivery- where local districts contract with local providers for pre-k- is not working is not accurate. It may not be running perfectly, but it is a relatively new system that just went through a pandemic. It works for us. There is a need to strengthen it and help it grow, not toss it away for a new system which reduces access to full day and full care programs.

Pre-k funding: Vermont has a strong network of non-profit early care and education programs. Many rely on the pre-k funding to support their pre-k work. With these dollars, they are able to ensure that the settings are appropriate, the schedule offers full-year coverage, and the teachers have been trained and are supported in early learning. Pushing a school agenda down on our little ones is a bad idea. Three and four years need the pre-k funding in approved programs.

Locations: Parents and family engagement are a critical part of early care and learning. Parents need to feel comfortable with the setting for their young children and need to be able to be close by for drop off, pick up, emergencies, breast feeding, etc. Parents of 4-year-olds need to be able to work in peace. This portion of the bill is unfriendly to working parents who are not wealthy. There is no way for an hourly employee to work 40 hours if they have to wait in bus lines at 8 a.m. and then pick up by 4 p.m. And what about vacations and summers? This is not enough care, which is built on relationships and needs to be consistent.

Licensing: Currently, schools and child care programs have different licensing requirements and look to different entities for that work. Classrooms may be available in schools but where? Parents are not going to be able to travel to far off elementary schools to drop their kids.

Transitions: Transitions are a problem in this plan for four-year-olds. Social emotional support is a huge need for young children. Transitions before and after school, for school breaks, and summer vacations are too much for this age child. Such transitions are still a struggle for many kindergarteners, much less for younger children.

The structural part of the bill: Establishing deputy secretaries in AOE and in AHS is interesting. It is not in line with System Analysis proposal for a new department for pre-k education, which might not be a bad thing. Moving people around and creating more state positions in a time when it is hard to hire, does not make sense. Furthermore, it does not work to change the culture of an agency by creating a single leader position.

This new proposal may be a challenge. The Agency of Education (AOE) has a very different culture than the Agency of Human Services and creating a leadership position will not solve this. There are still concerns from when kindergarten went into schools regarding the curricula for children. Many families and professionals feel that the testing and push for math and literacy at an early age are harmful to kindergarteners who are not ready for more formal, standardized learning. This would likely happen for 4-year-olds if placed in that system.

Profession: We, as a state, have been diligently developing the early care profession. We have spent much time and money, and we hope to keep building on that work. We need to create parity of pay, benefits, and professional development in the early care and education world. Family engagement, Strengthening Families, PCCs, STARS all have a family focus.

Example: At the Addison County Parent/Child Center (ACPCC) pre-k, we have 15 children who have 10 hours of education embedded in the care. We are aware that every moment of early care is education, but to split hairs for funding is what we have done. We receive a bit more than \$50,000, and are able to pay for a licensed teacher, Teaching Strategies Gold, and lower ratios. We have a 3 or 4:1 ratio in our classroom. We have been with the children from birth, and they have been cared for in the birth-3 classrooms. We focus on therapeutic care, and are able to work deeply on social and emotional goals for each child. As a result, children coming from the PCC program are often ready for kindergarten in ways that their peers may not be. We help families with transitions. School is a place that has often been difficult for many of the parents we serve. We need to build on our investments, not destroy them. We need the

public funding for the 3-year-olds in our program and want to keep the 4-year-olds. The early childhood setting is the right place for children this age.

Conclusion:

Again, the mixed delivery system for pre-k does work. If it isn't working in some areas, there are models to make it work. Existing community-based pre-k programs would be devastated by the loss of pre-k resources. Many will not survive, which will create a loss of spots for care. Pre-k programs are not the same as birth to three and it cannot be assumed that we can just push down the kind of care in programs. Birth to three programs are professional in their own right. Teachers and spaces need to be appropriately outfitted for younger children. We need to be investing in and elevating care and education that is developmentally appropriate for the age of the child.

Now is not the time to make the structural changes in child care and education that is called for in S. 56. This is a fragile system. We do not need to undo all that we have done. We need to commit to strengthening- not dismantling- those programs. Families thrive in early care and learning settings.

Thank you for all of your work,

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