

**Testimony of Susan Titterton from VTAEYC  
To the Vermont Senate Health and Welfare Committee  
On S.56  
February 22, 2023**

Chair Lyons and Respected Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I am honored.

My name is Susan Titterton. Since 2018, I have been the Project Coordinator for Advancing Early Childhood Education as a Recognized Profession, an initiative of the Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children. VT-AEYC's mission is to advance equity and excellence in early childhood education with early childhood educators as our foundation. As a membership organization, we provide resources and advocate for policies that move early childhood education forward now and for the future. We are an affiliate of NAEYC, whom you've just heard from.

I have the privilege of speaking today on behalf of the Advancing as a Profession Task Force and its workforce-led initiative that for the past three years has been building the foundation for advancing Early Childhood Education as a recognized profession in VT. That work has engaged well over 1,000 members of the VT ECE workforce (in fact we count over 3,000 individual contact points and over 200 group sessions) in determining whether and how to move forward as a recognized profession, as described in the national Unifying Framework, which Lauren referenced.

First, I will give a high-level overview of the work of Advancing ECE as a Profession.

Then, I will speak specifically to sections of S.56 that we might consider the heart of the bill, as they have potential to support advancing the profession in powerful and innovative ways.

Slide 2: We've known for quite some time that the early care and education system isn't working. NAEYC could see that at the national level; we could see that in VT.

Slide 3: As NAEYC began its work on Power to the Profession, culminating in the Unifying Framework, some of us in VT were paying close attention.

Slide 4: The Audacious Vision, while having some similarities to the language of the other visions we've heard, clearly includes having "an effective, diverse, well-prepared and well-compensated workforce."

Slide 5: Right from the beginning of our work in Vermont, we made the commitment that it would be workforce-led and consensus-based.

- Phase 1: The question: "What is the will of the workforce regarding advancing as a profession?"
  - We facilitated conversations in all regions of the state with a broad cross-section of the workforce - all settings (family-home-based, center-based, Head Start, school-based) and the response in companion survey was 72% supported advancing as a profession.

- Phase 2: The question: “Will the Vermont workforce choose to align with the Unifying Framework?”
  - A Task Force of 16 was formed with members from all regions of the state, including a diversity of programs and people - family child care homes, center-based, public, private, teachers, directors, early education coordinators, and higher education faculty. This group has studied the Unifying Framework, piece by piece, and taken it out to the broader workforce to share with them and to report their consensus - how much support is there for each piece, and what related questions and concerns have been most raised. I’ll share some details on that work in just a minute.
- Phase 3: Now, the question: “How will it work?”
  - Starting in Phase 2, we were reaching out to stakeholders in the ECE Ecosystem - AOE, CDD, BBF and their committees, Northern Lights at CCV, the Early Childhood Higher Education Consortium, legislators, and others with updates and dialogue. In just this last year, we’ve started doing some implementation design work in partnership with some of these entities. I’ll share a bit of that with you as well.

#### Slide 6: Professional Identity

- This slide shows the consensus of support for this piece that clearly describes who early childhood educators are and what they do.
- For implementation, this is now becoming common language used by more and more of the workforce in their program descriptions, communications with families, etc. and we see these terms in the recent RAND Financing Report.

#### Slide 7: Three Designations

- This slide connects three designations, what preparation they require, what they are qualified to do, and the idea of increasing compensation tied to the designations. You can see the consensus of support for this part of the Unifying Framework.
- For implementation, one frequently raised concern was how the current workforce, who might not have the educational credentials would fare in this new structure. So, there is a design team of current educators who have been helping to develop a “bridge” process that values experience and expertise, so we don’t lose anyone in the transition to the profession.

#### Slide 8: Professional Compensation

- This slide shows the consensus of support for Unifying Framework recommendations for professional compensation, which are about the principles for designing this, not the dollars.
- For implementation, a design team has drafted a Minimum Compensation Scale through a thoughtful, research-based process. Their result has been received positively by the workforce. Some key strengths of their work include:
  - Breaking down the average K-3 public school teacher wage to come up with an hourly wage that was then used in combination with the longer hours and more calendar days of other ECE programs to calculate a “true wage parity.”
  - Looking at other professions to inform their design, and
  - Doing preliminary work on a benefits package, especially health insurance
  - Framing their work around the 3 designations - ECE I, II, and III, as well as a “pipeline” category

Slide 9: Professional Licensure

- You can see the consensus of support for these recommendations in the Unifying Framework.
- For implementation, a couple things to note are the “bridge” design that I’ve already mentioned and also the responses for “Supports I Would Value.”

Slide 10: Workforce as the heart of the system

- With the thought that the workforce is the heart of the early childhood education system, there are sections of S.56 that we might think of as the heart of the bill.

Slide 11: S.56 and Professional Compensation

- We strongly support these starred parts of the proposal on professional compensation and add the details under each, which are also essential to advancing the profession.
- In addition, we urge you to include VT-AEYC as a partner with CDD and BBF and we also urge that partnership to build on the solid work that has already been produced by our design team.

Slide 12: S.56 and Workforce Supports

- We applaud your continuing attention to ongoing workforce supports. These two are important and there are others to be added as we go along.
- In addition, we urge you to pay attention to ECE preparation programs at CCV and 4-year colleges, as well as other high-quality preparation programs. They are essential, and vulnerable.
- And, we hope that as important near-term steps are proposed, debated and decided, that we will set a clear trajectory for where we envision going.

Slide 13: Trajectory for Advancing as a Profession

- Next steps:
  - Receiving and studying model legislation and discussing its application to Vermont
  - Have begun and will be continuing dialogue with the Office of Professional Regulation
- We are aiming for an early childhood education profession that people will be:
  - inspired by & drawn to
  - well-prepared for at the beginning & continually building their expertise along the way
  - able to survive and thrive in, as a sustainable & rewarding lifelong career

I thank you for your kind attention and your careful consideration of the children, families and early childhood educators of Vermont. If you have any questions, I will gladly do my best to answer.