

Hello Chair Wood,

Thank you again for inviting Susan Titterton and I to testify last week about VTAEYC's engagement with the early childhood workforce and the programs we are administering. I know you have been hearing lots of excellent testimony on child care and the committee is committed to preparing a bill that will best serve Vermont's children, their families, and early childhood educators. On Wednesday, I was encouraged by your remarks at the Courage to Care Rally! More than once, during the remarks, I was teary eyed and felt a true sense of hope. After all these years, it is incredible to think that this could really be happening!

At the conclusion of our testimony, you asked our opinion on which targeted investments would be most impactful. Such a great question and one that I was not prepared to answer! I am sure it was obvious, I believe investing in early childhood educator compensation is the highest priority and key to addressing the workforce crisis. Until we have a diverse, effective, prepared, and well compensated early childhood workforce it will be nearly impossible to achieve equitable access to high quality child care and positive outcomes for all of Vermont's children. To that end, we will still need ongoing investments and the necessary supports at every stage of professional learning and program quality improvement. If it is helpful, I want to elevate the current programs that will be critical for early childhood educator workforce recruitment and retention. Based on our data and feedback from the early childhood workforce, these are the priority areas for investment.

- Professional pathway and career awareness - the pre-apprenticeship program for high school career and technical center students
- Although the System for Program Access to Resources for Quality Supports Program (SPARQS/Coaching) is under development and will launch on July 1st, we know the ECE field is highly anticipating this to address a gap in the system. This program will provide coaching, mentoring and technical assistance for continuing quality improvements to early childhood programs and will support increasing STARS. We are concerned about the sustainability of these services once the federal pandemic funds end next year.
- T.E.A.C.H. - Teacher Education And Compensation Helps Program continues to be vital. (thank you so much for including an appropriation for TEACH in the latest draft!)
- The Student Loan Repayment Assistance Program will likely see an uptick with the expanded eligibility. As I understand it, the bill preserves the repeal on July 1, 2026 - we recommend extending the repeal to 2028
- Yesterday, First Children's Finance presented testimony on the Business and Technical Assistance Program, this would also be a wise investment.

In addition, we also support the recommendations from Let's Grow Kids:

- Health Insurance: Early childhood educators should be categorically eligible for a no- or low-cost silver-level health insurance plan through Vermont Health

- Connect beginning in 2024. Model statutory language is available from Washington State.
- CCFAP: Early childhood educators should be categorically eligible to receive CCFAP for their age-eligible children regardless of income. While raising eligibility rates for CCFAP overall would allow an increased number of early childhood educators to qualify, a more targeted approach would be to establish categorical eligibility for all early childhood educators working in regulated child care programs. This supports recruitment and retention of people working in child care programs who have young children of their own.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you have questions or need additional information.

With gratitude and respect,
Sharron

*My best,
Sharron*

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