

Andrea Viets
S.316
4/2/14

Good morning. Thank you for the invitation to speak with you. My name is Andrea Viets. I am a family child care provider in Burlington; my program is called The Birch House. I have a degree in Early Childhood Development from UVM and I have been working as a child care professional in both family and center-based care for more than thirty years.

With that experience in mind, I come to you this morning to tell you that over those thirty-plus years, I have developed extensive professional relationships with both my peers and state officials in the Child Development Division. I have participated in planning sessions for statewide initiatives such as STARS, Vermont's child care quality assessment program, and feel free to call or email these officials at any time with my questions, concerns, and ideas.

This bill would change that by ending my ability to communicate directly with these officials. All future communications would be conducted by Union representatives whom I will not select nor wish to be represented by. This bill would deny me my right to freedom of expression, and take away my professional voice, which I have used actively for decades.

As a home-based, or family, child care provider, I am an independent small business owner. I set my own working hours and tuition rates, my own sick time and vacation policies. I negotiate and pay for my own liability and health insurance. This proposed Union will **not** make me a state employee and it will **not** affect my terms of employment in any way. I will remain an independent small business owner who has been Unionized to protect me from – who??

I have heard the repeated claims by Union allies that a central goal of Unionization is to raise Subsidy reimbursement rates. My response to this premise is twofold.

First, Subsidy rates **do** need to be increased! That is the responsibility of the Governor and the Legislature. **You** have the power and authority to increase Subsidy rates, whether or not a Union exists. Please accept that power and authority, and raise the rates!

However, **don't** put the burden of that increase onto family child care providers by making us pay Union dues to lobby you to do the right thing.

Because second?

Second, any increase in Subsidy rates will benefit **families.** We as providers set our tuition rates, and families pay the difference between our tuition rates and whatever the current Subsidy rate is. So increasing the Subsidy rate will help families afford good child care, which is terrific. But this does not benefit providers.

We will end up with a net loss – paying Union dues of many hundreds of dollars for the **potential** of an increase to Subsidy rates that will benefit **families**. And the reality is, there is no guarantee that Subsidy rates would increase even if a Union came to be – because as we all know, the power and authority to raise those rates resides only with you.

And much as it pains me to say it – because over the past thirty years I have **always** served families eligible for Subsidy – I am so opposed to this Union and the ways in which it would silence my voice, I will choose to no longer serve these families if a Union comes to pass.

I find this position deeply troubling, for myself and for my profession. There is too little excellent child care already, and too few options for families with fewer financial resources. This legislation has the potential to further limit those options.

This bill does nothing to improve the quality or accessibility of child care in Vermont, but in fact holds the potential to **harm** our existing child care system. Losing excellent providers who might close their doors entirely, and losing providers who are willing to accept Subsidy-eligible families, would damage our already-fragile child care system.

I urge you to oppose this legislation. I would be happy to address any questions you may have. Thank you.