



MEMO

TO: Senate Appropriations Committee, Senator Jane Kitchel, Chair
FROM: Robyn Maguire, Campaign Director, Let's Grow Kids
DATE: April 8, 2015
RE: Blue Ribbon Commission on High Quality Affordable Child Care

Let's Grow Kids and the early childhood community support the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Cost and Financing Options for High Quality Affordable Child Care in House Appropriations Bill, H.490, Section C.101.

This Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) will review how we can best invest in our youngest children so they can have healthy and productive lives. In particular, the BRC will perform a check-up on our current system of child care and early learning from 0 to 5 to review its efficiencies and effectiveness and chart a course on how we can achieve high quality childcare in Vermont and how we can make it affordable for all Vermont families.

Investments In The Earliest Years Pay Tremendous Dividends Over The Long Term

We know that we're not consistently creating quality early experiences for all of Vermont's children, and we pay for it down the road. Studies show that children exposed to high-quality early childhood care and education have better language and math skills, better social skills, and better relationships with classmates. These students score higher in school-readiness tests, are 40% less likely to need special education or be held back a grade, and are 70% less likely to commit a violent crime by age 18. Clearly, investments in the earliest years pay tremendous dividends over the long term.

The Earliest Years Present The Greatest Opportunity For Healthy Development Of Children

Science tells us that the earliest years, when the brain is developing most rapidly, present the greatest opportunity for healthy development of our children. We also know that healthy development is dependent on quality early experiences during this critical time. But too many of Vermont's children do not have access to quality early experiences because the cost of childcare is unaffordable for parents at all socio-economic levels, and the costs associated with quality programming are unaffordable for providers. Consequently, 40-50% of Vermont's children enter kindergarten unprepared, and 32% of third graders are reading below grade level.

The original draft of the Commission language provided staffing from the legislature's Joint Fiscal Office. The House opted to remove this language. We respectfully request that the Senate replace this crucial voice at the table. This Commission is focused on cost and financing and will be reporting back to the Legislature. We believe we need to include Legislature's experts in cost and financing at the table.

Please Support the Blue Ribbon Commission in the Appropriations Bill

Thank you for your consideration. We appreciate that the Appropriations Committees face an incredibly difficult task this year. We see the BRC as an important opportunity to research possible long-term solutions to support Vermont's youngest residents. Ensuring every child has a strong start is imperative for the healthy development of Vermont's children, families, and communities.