

Written Testimony for the Winooski Hearing on the 2017-18 Budget

Good evening,

My name is Alex Tuck, and I am a local business owner, Winooski resident, and father of a 16-month-old, Elsie, with another one on the way. My family is very fortunate to have a strong community, a great support system, and enough income so that my wife, Isabel, can stay at home with our daughter full-time.

Unfortunately, when we talk to our friends, family, and neighbors, we quickly realize that this is just not a reality for most folks. We constantly see and hear the challenges that they face in locating quality, affordable care for their children. In Chittenden County where the opportunities are typically the greatest, 79% of infants likely to need care don't have access to high-quality programs.

Funding early care and learning isn't just the right thing to do for low income families. It is the smartest investment that we can make to reduce the amount of services that these children may likely need throughout the education process and into adulthood.

A major report that was just released by the Vermont Business Roundtable found that Vermont on the whole would receive a \$3 return on every \$1 invested in early care and learning programs. This would be thanks to a reduction in future costs in education, healthcare, and corrections. Children in these programs are less likely to need special education or be held back a grade, and are less likely to commit a violent crime. It's obvious that high-quality early education is good for children and parents, but we often forget the positive effect it has on our communities and our workforce as well.

Governor Scott's proposed \$7.5 million increase in CCFAP funding is a game changer for children and their families who struggle to afford care. It is also an essential increase for providers who are trying to support our children's healthy development while struggling to keep the lights on. This program has been chronically underfunded for several years, and this is the first serious investment we have seen in nearly two decades.

Not only does this increase get us back near current market rates, but it expands eligibility to more than 500 low income families who did not previously qualify. 500 families!

Please do not let us lose sight of the progress that this would provide for early education in Vermont. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony, and please find a way to increase our investments in high quality, affordable childcare in Vermont.