

Rebecca Buck

From: beththa@sunrisepcc.com
Sent: Tuesday, February 13, 2018 10:35 AM
To: Theresa Utton; Rebecca Buck
Subject: POSSIBLE SPAM: Testimony for the State Budget: TEACH Program and Farm-to-School & Early Ed Program

Dear Dear Members of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees,

Thank you for your service to the citizens of Vermont. I appreciate your support of Vermont's children and families as members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am a nearly 20-year resident of Bennington County and current Director for the Early Care & Education Program at Sunrise Family Resource Center, a parent child center. Through our NAEYC-accredited, 5 STAR Early Care & Education (ECE) Program, we provide advanced specialized care to children ages 6 weeks to 3 years, all of whom have all experienced – or are experiencing – trauma. All of the children and families that we serve are among Bennington County's most vulnerable. **On behalf of these children, I urge you to support the following appropriations for the TEACH Program and Farm-to-School and Early Education Program as part of the DCF budget.** Without TEACH, we can't continue to properly train our staff. Without good nutrition, children cannot grow and learn.

TEACH Program: I became program director in the fall, and my first task was to hire three new teachers. *Not one* of the applicants for those positions had an Early Childhood Education degree, which is now required by VT State Licensing. I was fortunate to hire excellent individuals who are willing to pursue their degrees, but at a wage of \$13-13.75/hour, they cannot afford it. The costs of maintaining a high quality early childhood program are too high for our agency to financially support the teachers fully in this endeavor. So the challenge is, now that we require teachers to have Early Ed degrees, how do we make that happen?

I have heard one TEACH Program success story after another from other center directors and teachers. Without this vital program, it is unclear how teachers will be able to afford the education required to remain in the field. Losing teachers is a frightening thought, given that we already have a shortage in the state. **The TEACH program reduces teacher turnover by an average of 94 percent.** All children, and especially those in our program, need qualified teachers. With 80% of brain development happening between the ages of 0-3, qualified early childhood teachers are critical for building the "brain architecture" that will set these children up for lifelong success. Research shows that child outcomes are linked to the educational qualifications of their teachers - it is essential that we support teachers' efforts to obtain their degrees through the TEACH Program. Investing in our teachers is really an investment in our children - an investment that will pay dividends for decades to come. I urge you to support allocating \$320,000 for FY19 to sustain the current level of support that TEACH Vermont offers.

Farm-to-School and Early Care and Education Program: All of the children in our program come from families experiencing food insecurity. Many children arrive hungry. We provide two nutritious, home cooked meals and one snack daily for the children in our program. Last month our stove broke. Fortunately, we had just received a Farm-to-Child Care Kitchen Equipment Grant that allowed us to replace it. Next year we hope to apply for a larger grant that would support a Farm-to-School and Early Care and Education partnership with local farmers to provide fresh, nutritious food to these children who otherwise will not get it. **Good nutrition is one of the basic building blocks for a healthy brain.** The Farm-to-School Program is level funded at

\$181,000 for FY19 but needs \$500,000 to realize the goals of reaching every community in Vermont, including expanding grant funds to child care programs like ours. Please support an expansion of funding of \$300,000 for FY19.

Please feel free to contact me either via this email address or at [\(802\) 442-0025](tel:(802)442-0025) if you have questions or would like more information on how these programs impact the children in our care.

Thank you again for your work on behalf of Vermont's children and families.

Most sincerely,

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