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In Rutland, 63% of infants who are likely to need care don't have access to any regulated child care programs. As we face a sea of gray hair marching off into retirement, we need to ask ourselves: who is marching in to replace them? How are we attracting a new and vibrant workforce to our state? What are we doing to make Vermont the best place to move to, to live in and to raise a family?

We know that when a job applicant deliberates about whether to accept a new job, they consider a list of things: quality of life? We have that here. Good schools? We have that too. Good, affordable housing? In some areas. Accessible, quality child care? Needs our help.

We simply don't have enough child care to serve our workforce. Only 37% of Rutland's children have day care available. If parents with young children don't have child care, they can't work. When they can't work, we can't fill the positions we need to in order to run our business smoothly. As Rutland loses droves of our workforce to retirement in the next ten years, Vermont needs to adjust how we attract and retain young families to this state, and ensuring that all families have access to high-quality child care that they can afford is a major piece of that puzzle. If we do that, we will beat out our neighboring states for the workforce we are all competing for.

Vermont and its businesses need to start thinking differently about the child care paradigm. Knowing that their children are safe and well cared for in a day care setting allows parents of either gender to be more productive and reliable at their work place. That impacts everyone's bottom line – the state, its businesses and its residents.

A report released this month by Vermont Business Roundtable shows annual benefits to the state “of nearly \$22 million per year for the next 60 years, just for the 2016 cohort of students under age 6.”

“Society would receive \$3.08 for every additional dollar invested by Vermont's government in the expansion of [Early Care and Learning] programs.”

“These benefits come from increased future earnings and taxes of children and mothers, reduced health care costs, reduced K–12 costs of special education and repeating grades, as well as reduced future crime, substance abuse, and child welfare costs.”

“The total net benefits after deducting costs from expanding early care and learning programs in Vermont could reach \$1.3 billion.” (*Vermont’s Early Care and Learning Dividend*. Wilder Research. Feb. 2016).

Vermont has a decision to make: we can either be proactive and make this the best place to live and raise a family, or we can do nothing and continue the budget tailspin that we are in. It is time to act: please support an increase of \$9.6 million to early care and learning in FY18.