



Date: Wednesday, April 13, 2017

To: Senate Committee on Education

From: Janet McLaughlin, Executive Director, Vermont Birth to Five

RE: Proposed modification to the STARS language in Act 166, 16 V.S.A. §829(c)

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Thank you very much for inviting me to speak with you today. My name is Janet McLaughlin and I am the Executive Director of Vermont Birth to Five, a project of the Permanent Fund for Vermont's Children.

Vermont Birth to Five (VB5) is a nonprofit initiative that works in partnership with state agencies, community organizations, and child care providers to increase the quality and sustainability of early care and learning programs in Vermont. Our work includes the Vermont Community Preschool Collaborative (VCPC), which focuses on supporting and sustaining quality preschool and pre-K programming. This includes supporting the implementation of publicly-funded pre-K in Vermont through STARS support, financial coaching, mentoring providers earning their teaching licenses with early childhood education (ECE) endorsements, and providing grants to support school/community partnerships. VB5 supports the Department for Children and Families' proposal to modify the STARS language that is included in the prequalification section of Act 166 in order to remove an unintended barrier for providers without negatively impacting the quality of programming.

As you have heard, the two-points rule requires prequalified pre-K providers to have at least two points in each of the five arenas within STARS. VB5 believes that this requirement serves as an unintended barrier that impacts both community-based and school-based prequalified pre-K programs. While all 5-Star programs have achieved 2 points in each of the five STARS arenas, some 4-Star programs may not have two points in each of the five arenas. A significant contributor is the 'compliance' arena in which you must have a clean regulatory history for 36 months in order to earn 2 points. For new programs or programs that need to obtain a new license or registration due to a situation such as relocation, expansion of ages served, etc., there is no way for their program to have 2 points in the compliance arena, purely because they have not been in operation for a sufficient period of time to meet the 2-point threshold.

If the modification is not made to statute prior to the start of the 2017-2018 academic year, it is our understanding that numerous school-based and community-based providers will be denied prequalification. This will result in a significant decrease to the supply of publicly-funded pre-K in our state, which is not the intention of Act 166 and would negatively impact Vermont's young children and their families.

Additionally, the STARS system is undergoing a comprehensive validation study by a third-party national expert. Once the study is complete, the system will be evaluated and changes will be made to strengthen STARS in order to continue to develop quality in our early care and learning system. This validation, evaluation, and systems-change process naturally lends itself to also revisit pre-K prequalification requirements, as they pertain to STARS.

VB5 is committed to supporting providers in enhancing the quality of their early care and learning programs. We appreciate this committee's attention to the issue of prequalification, and we encourage you to adopt DCF's recommended modification.

Thank you for your time and consideration.