

Testimony for the Senate Education Committee
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Colleen Christman
Registered Home Child Care Provider, South Burlington VT

Good afternoon. My name is Colleen Christman. Thank you for taking the time to hear my testimony today. I'm excited to talk with you about the proposed revisions to Act 166 and share with you information from my perspective as a registered home childcare professional.

First a bit of background-- I am a 5 Star registered home childcare provider in South Burlington and for the past 5 years, I have been a PreK partner, first through Act 62, and most recently with Act 166. This year, I have 6 qualifying PreK students from 3 different towns, as well as a 9 month old, toddler, school ager, and my own two children-- one whom we homeschool. On any given day, I have between 5 and 8 children in my program.

As a program owner, I have discovered the importance of offering various service options, as families have differing financial and schedule needs. My program is open year-round for three full days each week. Families can choose to attend any combination of full or half days (AM and PM), school year only or full year. Those that choose my program have the benefit of a multi-age environment, a consistent caregiver from birth onward, and the ability for siblings to grow up together in a family-centered environment. I offer this unique home program option in order to increase the accessibility and equity of state-funded preK options for my community while also maintaining the aforementioned benefits. Not all home programs can or do offer similar options (in fact, many home programs only offer full time care), leaving some families struggling to find affordable preschool options for their children. There are also many programs that *want* to be able to offer preK services through Act 166 but are unable to for various reasons-- the main reason being-- access to and affordability of a licensed teacher. If a home provider is not already a licensed early childhood educator, hiring a licensed teacher for 3 hours a week (as specified in the current Act 166 language) can add an additional \$2600 to \$3700 to their operating budget (based on an hourly rate of \$20-30 per hour). To financially justify this expense, home providers need to have multiple preK students enrolled in their program. Even still-- programs either adjust their rates to accommodate this additional cost, or they subsidize the cost for families. Additionally, with the potential for family turn-over, contracting a licensed preK teacher comes with financial risk to a home provider.

There is concern over the language in the proposed revisions requiring private providers-- both center AND home-based programs to employ or contract a licensed early childhood educator who is present at the program site during the hours that are publicly funded. For home programs, eliminating the option of a supporting teacher for 3 hours a week and increasing the weekly hourly requirement of a contracted teacher to 10 hours each week will create a hardship for many home programs. Maintaining a financially sustainable early childhood program that is also affordable for families is VERY difficult. With the current proposed language, a home program-- with a max of 6 full-time preK students will have the same cost for a licensed preK teacher as a large center with upwards of 50 preK students. Many home programs will not be able to financially sustain the cost of a qualified EC teacher without dramatically increasing tuition rates,

and with an already limited pool of licensed EC educators, availability of these teachers will decrease. I urge you to reconsider this revision. Furthermore, you may also want to examine additional markers of educator qualification, such as that required of approved independent schools, who also accept state tuition funds and are not currently required to employ licensed teachers.

(Side note: publicly is spelled wrong at the top of page 3 of the revision.)

I appreciate that the current Act 166 and proposed revision recognize the importance of a mixed delivery system. There are currently 389 pre-qualified PreK programs available to families throughout the state. Of these 389 programs, 138 are public PreK programs, 209 are licensed programs and 42 are registered homes. (This information can be found in the Building Bright Futures Child Care Information System-- BFIS.) Having a mixed delivery system allows families to choose a program that best fits their family and child's needs. Not any one program is the same-- each has a unique combination of attributes that draw families to them. Having a common, state-wide system for comparing and upholding quality and safety standards is essential. Using the STAR System has been an efficient method for comparing the quality of programs (both public and private) and the newly implemented child care regulations offers a comprehensive minimum safety standard for state-regulated programs.

Maintaining and upholding quality and safety standards needs to be a priority. The current revision states that public programs will no longer be subject to the same regulations and quality standards as private programs. As a parent and early child care professional, this concerns me. On page 7 of the revisions, it states that the Secretary of Education shall propose rules "to establish safety and quality requirements for public providers." If these quality and safety standards are different than that of private providers, how will the public truly be able to compare the quality of programming between these two types of PreK providers? I also wonder if having two sets of quality and safety standards (one for private programs under the CDD and another for public programs under the AOE) is an efficient use of resources and time.

Increasing the accessibility and equity of preK programming also remains key. The current revision also eliminates 3 star programs from being eligible to receive preK funding. According to BFIS, prequalified programs with 3 STARS attributes to approximately 14% of private prequalified programs. (19% of home programs, and 12% of center-based program). Not included in this number are the 7 public programs that have achieved 3 STARS. [See Table/Chart on pgs. 4 & 5] I looked at the allotted preK slots listed in each 3 STAR program's description on BFIS and by my estimates, these private programs could serve nearly 400 preschool age children. Eliminating the 3 STAR provision will decrease the amount programs eligible to receive preK funding and limit the program choices available to families, leaving many families potentially underserved. In some areas of Vermont, these 3 STAR programs are some of the only options to families in that town. [See Table on pg. 6]

A few data points that I could not find were-- where are the low income families? By eliminating the eligibility of 3 STAR programs, will we inadvertently limit populations we are most trying to serve? It is common for programs with higher STARS to also have higher tuition and I am curious if the income demographics follow with STARS ratings. I am in support of increasing the quality of early childhood education in Vermont, but we must do so in a conscience way. I suggest that you keep the 3 STAR eligibility, but as a 2 year provisional allowance-- much like a one-time provisional teaching

license/endorsement. This will help increase PreK options for families AND help to increase quality. In the past several years, there have been many changes in the Vermont EC system-- Act 166, new and increased childcare regulations, STARs has been revised and our professional development system has been overhauled. We need opportunities to build leadership in our field. I believe having a provisional option for 3 STAR programs would help this.

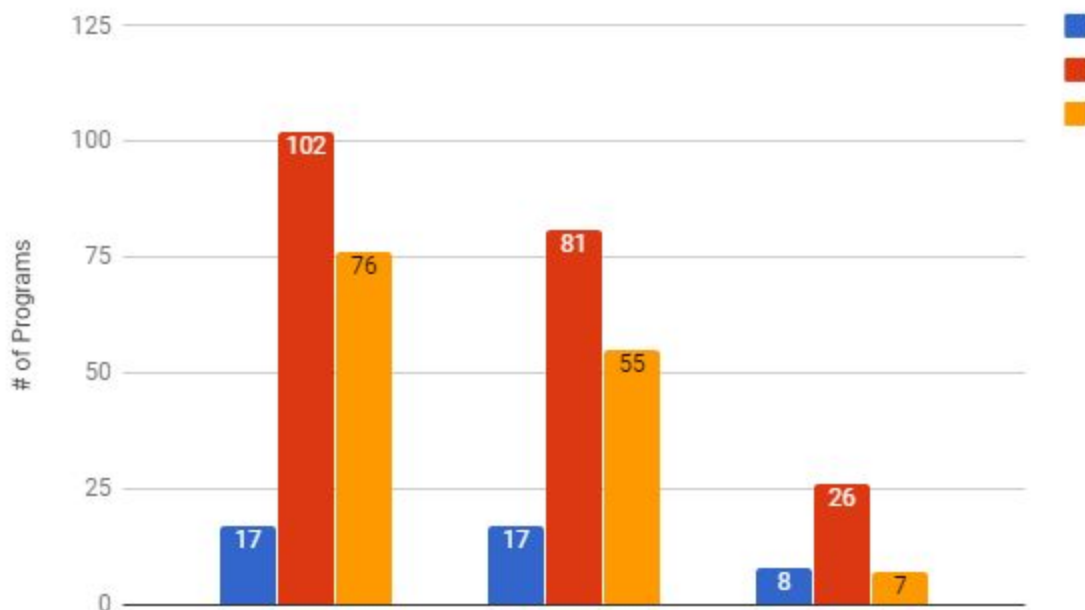
In conclusion, I understand and can support the *intentions* behind the PreK revisions. Streamlining services through one central agency would be helpful to most programs. Those programs serving students in multiple districts would benefit from one central agency for enrollment and invoicing. This would personally save me time and reduce some of my administration work. I currently submit attendance, invoices and partner contracts to each district with whom I partner. I can't imagine doing this for a large center! Increasing the quality of early childhood education is also key, but as I mentioned earlier, we must look at the effects these actions have on our community and weigh them in depth. Accessibility and equity are essential and understand there is no "one size fits all" environment.

I am happy to answer any other questions you have, either now or in the future. Thank you so much for you time.

Numbers of Prequalified PreK Providers State-wide

Star level	Program type	Pre Qualified Programs	% of Program Type	Total Programs
5	Registered Home	17	40.4%	24
	Licensed	102	48.8%	215 (incl. public)
	Public	76	55.1%	
4	Registered Home	17	40.4%	86
	Licensed	81	38.8%	192 (incl. public)
	Public	55	39.9%	
3	Registered Home	8	19.0%	166
	Licensed	26	12.4%	93 (incl. public)
	Public	7	5.1%	

Current Pre-Qualified Prekindergarten Programs



Note: This information was gathered on 2/8/2018 using the BFIS "Find a Provider" tab.
<http://www.brightfutures.dcf.state.vt.us>

Public School locations with only 3 Stars:

Accreditation or approved prequalified preschool program:

Prequalified PreK Program - Public School ▼

Star Level:

3 Star ▼

Search

Search Results

Click on the "Details" link to view a provider's referral information.

Displaying 1-7 of 7 Items

Provider Name	Contact Information	Town	Program Type
Saint Albans City School	29 Bellows St. St Albans, VT 05478 City: St Albans City (802)527-0565	St Albans	Licensed Provider
Burke Town School Pre-Kindergarten Program	3293 Burke Hollow Road Burke, VT 05871 City: Burke (802)467-3385	Burke	Licensed Provider
Ripton Elementary School	753 Lincoln Road Ripton, VT 05766 City: Ripton (802)388-2208	Ripton	Licensed Provider
Montpelier Public Schools Early Childhood Program	1 Park Ave Montpelier, VT 05602 City: Montpelier (802)225-8223	Montpelier	Licensed Provider
Washington Village School	72 School Lane Washington, VT 05675 City: Washington (802)223-6136	Washington	Licensed Provider
Fisher Elementary Pre-K Program	504 East Arlington Road Arlington, VT 05250 City: Arlington (802)375-6409	Arlington	Licensed Provider
Craftsbury Town School Preschool	84 North Craftsbury Road Craftsbury, VT 05826 City: Craftsbury (802)586-9671	Craftsbury	Licensed Provider

3 STAR Home Program location	# of Current 4/5 Star Prequalified Home-based Options	# of Current 4/5 Star Prequalified Center-based Options	Public (4/5 STAR)	3 STAR Licensed Program location	# of Current 4/5 Star Prequalified Home-based Options	# of Current 4/5 Star Prequalified Center-based Options	Public (4/5 STAR)
Derby	0	2	1	Brandon	0	0	1
Essex	1	8	2	Colchester (3)	0	5	1
Fairfax	0	0	1	E. Montpelier	1	1	1
Franklin	1	0	1	Essex (2)	1	8	2
St. Albans (2)	2	3	1	Fairfax	0	0	1
St. Johnsbury	0	6	1	Jericho	0	1	1
Windsor	1	1	1	Lyndon (2)	0	2	1
				Manchester (2)	1	2	1
				Newbury	0	0	1
				Orwell	1	0	0
				Rutland	0	4	2
				S.Burlington	3	6	2
				St. Johnsbury	0	6	1
				Stowe	0	3	1
				Sutton	0	0	0
				Troy	1	1	1
				Vernon	0	0	0
				Waterbury	1	1	1
				Wolcott	0	0	1
				Woodstock	0	1	0

16 V.S.A. § 166 <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/section/16/003/00166>

§ 166. Approved and recognized independent schools

(a) Authority. An independent school may operate and provide elementary education or secondary education if it is either approved or recognized as set forth herein.

(b) Approved independent schools. On application, the State Board shall approve an independent school that offers elementary or secondary education if it finds, after opportunity for hearing, that the school provides a minimum course of study pursuant to section 906 of this title and that it substantially complies with the Board's rules for approved independent schools. Except as provided in subdivision (6) of this subsection, the Board's rules must at minimum require that the school has the resources required to meet its stated objectives, including financial capacity, faculty who are qualified by training and experience in the areas in which they are assigned, and physical facilities and special services that are in accordance with any State or federal law or regulation. Approval may be granted without State Board evaluation in the case of any school accredited by a private, State, or regional agency recognized by the State Board for accrediting purposes.