



Date: Tuesday, April 11, 2017
To: Senate Committee on Education
From: Robyn Freedner-Maguire, Campaign Director, Let's Grow Kids
Re: H. 513 and its implication on fingerprint-supported FBI criminal record checks on Vermont's prekindergarten system.

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak with you today. My name is Robyn Freedner-Maguire and I am the campaign director for Let's Grow Kids. Let's Grow Kids is committed to ensuring that all children, birth to five, have access to high-quality, affordable early care and learning programs, and I am here to speak to you today about H. 513 and the potential impact of the bill's language regarding fingerprint-supported criminal record checks on Vermont's prekindergarten system. While we understand that there have been challenges navigating the legal requirements of the Agency of Education and the Agency of Human Services' Child Development Division in regards to fingerprint-supported criminal record checks, we are concerned that the current language in H. 513 regarding criminal record checks would result in the bifurcation of oversight of publicly-funded pre-K programs.

Based on our reading of Sections 11 and 12 of H. 513, it seems as if the sections would result in child care facilities, those programs licensed by the Child Development Division, no longer being subject to Agency of Education requirements for fingerprinting, and prekindergarten programs operated in public schools no longer being subject to any of the center-based child care and preschool program rules or regulations required by the Agency of Human Services' Child Development Division.

Let's Grow Kids believes that it is important for the two agencies to continue to maintain joint oversight of prekindergarten programs. We believe that the current partnership yields strong outcomes for children, bringing together the education expertise of the Agency of Education and the early childhood health and development expertise of the Child Development Division. Implementation of Act 166 has also highlighted how the Child Development Division's Center-Based Child Care and Preschool Program regulations and quality recognition and improvement system, known as STARS, can provide important guidance for public school-operated prekindergarten program.

During this first year of full implementation of Act 166, not all prekindergarten programs operated by public schools have achieved higher quality designations in STARS, and we see a benefit to CDD continuing their joint oversight over these programs to continue to support them in developing their quality of their programs in ways that reflect the needs of young children. Additionally, we believe it is important to maintain joint oversight of these programs, as some prekindergarten programs operated by public schools have received licensure violations under the center-based child care and preschool program regulations. This points to a need for CDD to continue to have oversight over these programs to ensure the health and safety of young children.

We encourage this committee to review the proposal to address the issue of fingerprint-supported FBI criminal record checks that was jointly developed by AOE and AHS and presented to the House Committee on Education earlier this year as a possible solution for this situation, as we believe that any solution to this situation should address the specific issue of criminal record checks rather than bifurcating oversight of Vermont's prekindergarten system.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration of this critical issue.