



**STATE OF VERMONT**  
SENATE CHAMBER

**To:** The Senate Appropriations Committee (Senator Kitchel, Chair)  
**From:** Senate Education (Senator Baruth, Chair)  
**Re:** 2017 Committee Funding Priorities  
**Date:** Thursday, April 13, 2017

Dear Madam Chair and Appropriations Committee,

Given that this is my first year of service as a Chair, I'm guessing as to proper procedure around our committee's funding requests. We understand that your task is especially daunting this year, given the budget gap and the Governor's stated opposition to taxes and fees, but with that said we're writing as a committee to let you know where we would direct Education dollars were we in your shoes, given the testimony and discussions we've had this session. Our priorities, in order, are these:

1) Increased Funding for Early Childhood Education and Pre-K, wherever investment will strengthen the existing system or render more providers viable in geographical regions with fewer options, such as increasing the subsidy per child. To take one possibility, last December Vermont's Blue Ribbon Commission on Financing High Quality, Affordable Child Care recommended immediate, incremental investments in the state's Child Care Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP). Such an investment would increase the viability for both working parents and providers. Our testimony indicates that the problems with Act 166 are regional in nature and growing in severity – some centers have already closed and more may do so. We believe a careful investment here could alleviate some of these issues, though we'll be revisiting Act 166 more broadly next year.

2) Afterschool Grant Programs. While Vermont has yet to fund these grant programs, both House and Senate Committees have had convincing, multi-year testimony about their efficacy in promoting learning, retention and equality of opportunity, especially in students and families at the lower end of the socioeconomic scale. The Senate Education Committee supports the request for an appropriation into the Expanded Learning Opportunities Special Fund.

3) Enhanced Funding for Higher Education. The Governor's initial suggestion, that we provide stronger funding to the state colleges and UVM, found strong support in our committee. The financial outlook of some of our state colleges is concerning; we fear that without substantial increases, we could face the closure of one or more of our campuses. Chancellor Spaulding refers to this as an "existential moment" for their financial health, and to the extent that your committee can find ways to bolster their bottom lines – even temporarily – we believe you'd be doing those institutions (and the communities and students that rely on them) a great favor.

We won't offer more than three recommendations – this is an extremely lean year. But we wanted to offer our collective opinion on where any funds might most effectively and efficiently be spent. If we can offer any further testimony on any of these suggestions, please be in touch.

Thank you for the time, and your work bringing the budget into balance.

Best,

Senator Phil Baruth, Chair  
Senator Becca Balint, Vice Chair  
Senator Debbie Ingram, Clerk  
Senator Kevin Mullin  
Senator Joe Benning  
Senator Chris Bray