

Hello. My name is Kim Meilleur. I live in Georgia with my husband and our 6 year-old daughter who attends kindergarten at Georgia Elementary. My husband and I work full-time in Burlington – I am at UVM and he is with the Burlington Housing Authority. I am here today to talk about giving all of our children equitable access to the care and experiences they need to reach their full potential and live their best possible life.

*during their earliest years*

We all now know how much more important the early years of childhood are than we ever thought before. Not only is it critically important that our children be in safe environments, but also that they are in enriching environments, forming those strong, positive brain connections (one million every second) that they need for their social and emotional development and learning. Babies and toddlers are like sponges, soaking in everything around them, and we need to ensure that the majority, if not all, of their early childhood moments are spent in positive, enriching environments so they are soaking in all that is needed to have the best chance at their best life. This is how we break cycles of poverty, and reduce rates of incarceration, addiction, anxiety, depression and so on. I work at UVM and one of the most important topics in higher education today is around the increase in anxiety and depression among college students and how to support those students. My husband works with Section 8 housing, and day after day he sees the cycle of poverty – infants and toddlers living in households with parents stressed to their limits just trying to get by, and without the tools, time or money to provide enriching environments for their babies and young children.

This issue is broad – whether we are parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, daycare providers, business owners, employees, community members – it touches us all. Children who have high quality early care and learning experiences are so much more equipped to become confident, stable, contributing members of our communities and to live their best lives. To ensure that all children have access to high quality early care and learning requires a significant investment now, but the payout will be huge down the road when we finally see cycles of poverty being broken, reduced incarcerations, reduced need for early interventions in school, reduced chronic disease, anxiety, depression and substance abuse and the reduction to all of the costs that go along with these things.

Today I am asking you to invest in our children in order to give each of them an equitable chance at their best life, and to make Vermont the best state to raise a family. The system in place now is broken – 77% of Vermont’s children are missing out at the opportunity for high-quality care, providers are ridiculously underpaid, and businesses don’t know how to make a difference. I am asking that you fully fund all components within bill H194. This bill targets three critical areas – increasing funding for CCFAP so more families can access childcare assistance; supporting early educators with loan repayment, increased scholarships and tax credits; and engaging employers in the early care system through refundable tax credits for those who implement child care supports. Each of these 3 areas is critically important to begin to make momentous change for our children and for this state. Thank you.