

My name is Trisha Scharf and I own and operate an early care and learning center in Williston. I'm here to talk about early learning from a business owner perspective. Our staff of 14 currently serves 65 children from 53 families. I'm here to ask you to support H194.

As a business owner, I know that my program is only as good as the teachers in it. We all know the science by now. During the first years of life, one million new brain connections are formed every second. Science has proven that it is through positive interactions with adults that these brain connections are used and strengthened. Therefore, the quality of any early care and learning, whether it be home-based or center-based, is totally determined by the people providing that care and learning, by the quality of those interactions. We need well-educated and experienced people interacting with our children every day.

But, as a business owner, I find it almost impossible to find and keep these people. The average hourly wage for someone working in early education in Vermont is \$12.71. Think about that. McDonalds starts people with no education or experience at \$13.00/hour. And often with better benefits than one can get working in early education.

Early educators are so undercompensated that colleges and universities are counseling young people NOT to pursue a degree in early childhood because these young people would not be able to support themselves or repay their college loans on an early educator's wages. There is no return on their educational investment. Organizations such as Vermont Works for Women will not counsel women to enter the early childhood workforce because these women would not be able to earn enough to break the cycle of poverty.

We desperately need early educators, not only for our children and families, but also to increase our capacity and build Vermont's workforce. The only way we can do that is to provide financial incentives for people to enter the early childhood profession. The loan repayment and tax credits outlined in H194 are definitely a step in the right direction. Please fund H194.

Thank you for your time.

Trisha Scharf

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