



February 14th, 2020

To: House Committee on Commerce & Economic Development

From: Lisa Ventriss, President, Vermont Business Roundtable

Testimony on Investments in Early Childhood Educators and the Workforce

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Lisa Ventriss, President of the Vermont Business Roundtable.

The Roundtable is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide organization of 100 CEOs from Vermont's top private and nonprofit employers, representing geographic diversity and all major sectors of the Vermont economy. We are committed to sustaining a sound economy and preserving Vermont's unique quality of life by studying and making recommendations on statewide public policy issues.

During my 18 years with the Roundtable we have consistently championed the need for high-quality, affordable child care for Vermont families. Concurrently, we have been sounding the alarm about the looming – now present – workforce crisis for nearly my entire tenure. These two topics are inextricably linked.

I'm here today to talk about how investing in our early childhood education workforce is vital to achieving both high-quality child care across our state, and to unlocking the greater workforce potential in Vermont.

Our strength at the Roundtable lies in our ability to harness the intellectual power of our diverse membership to apply thoughtful research and analysis to challenges facing the State.



As you heard from Michael Seaver, President of People’s United Bank, and former Roundtable Chairman, our business leaders are ready to champion solutions to Vermont’s biggest problems.

Over the last two decades, the Roundtable has consistently highlighted the importance of high-quality early care and learning for both employers and for the health of our state.

Our research and analysis led to two noteworthy published reports including 2017’s, *Vermont’s Early Care & Learning Dividend*, which demonstrated that for every dollar invested in high-quality child care, the state would see a return on investment of \$3.08 – notably in education and criminal justice programs and services.

We also authored the 2006 report, *Having the Courage to Change*, which noted that early childhood education plays a crucial role in supporting the state’s economy, and that efforts to address the then-looming workforce crisis must include a high-quality early education system that prepares every Vermont child to enter Kindergarten “ready to learn.”

If we want to give Vermont’s next generation the opportunity to succeed, then our generations need to support the early educators who will nurture them.

Roundtable members believe that a strong early care and education system is the best way to ensure future success for every Vermont child. It is also the best way to ensure a stable workforce today.

We need to support and advance the careers of early educators because they are the pillars of a strong education system, and their strength creates the fundamental structure that ensures a strong Vermont workforce and healthy society.

Each year, the Roundtable surveys its members to determine their most pressing issues. One question we ask is “What issue keeps you up at



night?” Increasingly, child care for their employees appears among the top responses.

If you know a parent of a young child, then you know their struggles to access affordable high-quality care. But now it’s becoming increasingly clear that the child care struggles of families directly impacts our businesses’ ability to stabilize and grow.

Parents and caregivers need a reliable, affordable child care system to work. Our early educators offer the safe, nurturing space that allows employees to accept jobs, show up to work, and advance their careers. When parents can return to work, then they can contribute to a thriving economy.

Though the workforce crisis now surrounds us, the opportunity to invest in solutions is also within reach. One of those solutions is to invest in adequate supports to grow our early child care workforce.

Loan repayment; expanding scholarships to early childhood educators; and, creating a wage supplement program are real solutions that could have a tangible effect on the early child care workforce and, from there, on our entire workforce.

We also need to acknowledge the efforts of employers in communities who are innovating through pilot programs and community partnerships to expand access to quality child care.

The Roundtable is proud to support these statewide efforts to ensure high-quality child care, and we hope the legislature will invest in Vermont’s early care and learning workforce to make this possible.

Thank you.