

May 4, 2020

Dear Members of the House Committee on Human Services,

We represent the Early Care and Education (ECE) community of Bennington County and are writing in support of letters previously sent to you by the ECE communities of Chittenden and Addison Counties. In a recent email from VtAEYC Sonja Raymond wrote, "At this moment, the State is showing unprecedented levels of sympathy and listening to ECE advocacy groups and the ECE workforce. Vermont is asking what we need to reopen as an industry." We are grateful for the opportunity to inform future decisions regarding re-opening, and in that spirit, we would like to add the following comments to information provided via the recent survey put out by the Child Development Division regarding the re-opening process.

First, we want to thank you for all that you have done thus far to help stabilize the child care workforce during this unprecedented pandemic. As this crisis has demonstrated, child care is the backbone of the economy. Without it, the majority of Vermont's workforce may be unable to return to work.

This pandemic has changed everyone's world in extraordinary ways. We are working from home, schooling from home, teaching from home, connecting from home. It is isolating, frustrating, and often anxiety-ridden. Some of us are serving the children of essential workers and some of us have had to close our doors. We are all concerned about re-opening our doors to our regularly enrolled families. How will we do so in a safe, equitable, and financially stable way?

It is imperative that we have strong guidance from the State during this transition, and many questions and considerations remain.

- What measures will be expected of us?
- How many children will we be able to serve? If not our full capacity, then which families will be allowed to come back and which will not? Our estimates show that care under the current emergency care guidelines costs twice as much as regular care.
- Will the families of essential workers who have started attending other programs go back to their "home" programs or stay at their new programs?
- What can providers do about staff who are unable or unwilling to return to work at this time?
- What happens to the children of the essential workers we serve if we need to close temporarily because someone at our facility has become ill with COVID-19?
- How can we continue to provide both onsite and remote continuity of learning with our preschool and school-age children while also providing care and education for our infants and toddlers?
- How will we afford and obtain the cleaning supplies and PPE that we will need to appropriately sanitize and outfit our facilities?

- Will financial stabilization continue? If so, for how long? Will it continue to cover school-age children?
- Will we be allowed to run our summer programs? If so, in what capacity?
- Will we be given a reasonable, concrete timeline and guidelines for re-opening that will allow for a successful transition?

We are also concerned about support for our hardworking staff.

- Our staff need to know that they will have health care coverage and paid leave if they or a family member of theirs should become ill (if not already covered by their employer).
- They need to know that they will be sufficiently compensated for the work that they do to make sure that the children of our communities are cared for, supported, and engaged in high quality learning environments while their parents are working. This is especially important at a time when their low wages are thrown into stark contrast with generous unemployment benefits and the ever-present lure of higher wages in almost any other field.
- Many staff need care for their own school-age children if we reopen before the end of the school year.
- They need to feel safe, supported, and be recognized as essential to the rebuilding of our State's economy.

Together we stand united to ask for your help in making this transition successful for all - for families, early childhood programs, communities, the economy and the future of Vermont.

Now, more than ever, early childhood educators need support, respect and financial backing to continue in our work - work that shapes generations of Vermonters. We hope to join with you to create an early childhood education system that will not only be successful now, but also well into the future. We are ready to work with you and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Bennington County Starting Points Leadership Network and the following programs:

<b>Director/Owner:</b>	<b>Program Name:</b>	<b>Town:</b>	<b># of children served/staff:</b>
Alyson Grzyb benningtonecc@gmail.com	Bennington Early Childhood Center	Bennington	75/18
Beth Traver Adolphus directoroakhill@comcast.net	Oakhill Children's Center	Pownal	75/18
Frances Busa rpiecc1@sover.net	Readsboro Preschool	Readsboro	20/7
Betsy Rathbun-Gunn brgunn@ucsvt.org	UCS/Head Start-Early Head Start	Bennington	169/58
Rebecca Bishop rbishop@ucsvt.org	UCS/Head Start-Early Head Start	Bennington	

Christine Becker	The School of Sacred Heart St Francis de Sales Bennington		22/4
	kindechris1@comcast.net		
Anne Simonds	Sunrise Family Resource Center	Bennington	22/10
	asimonds@sunrisepcc.com		
Lori Pinsonneault	Sunrise Family Resources Center	Bennington	
	lorip@sunrisepcc.com		
Cathy Lawrence	Lawrence School for Young Children	East Dorset	40/6
	callsyc@hotmail.com		
Lori Elwell	Village School of North Bennington	North Bennington	23/7
	lelwell@vsnb.org		
Laurie Metcalfe	Northshire Day School	Manchester	95/25
	lmetcalfe@northshiredayschool.org		
Nancy Noel	The Learning Tree	Bennington	45/15
	nancy.noel@svhealthcare.org		
Cara Watson	Miles of Smiles	Bennington	10/1
	martha514@aol.com		
Pam Upright	Growing Upright at the CDC	Bennington	18/5
	pupright@svcdc.org		
Kali Harris	The Collaborative	Londonderry	54/10
	kharris@brsu.org		