



Testimony to Senate Education Committee on S.10

January 25, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you about Senate Bill 10 as proposed. My name is Chloe Learey, I am the Executive Director of the Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development in Brattleboro. We provide early education and community-based service including CIS, FSH, CCFAP, and Child Care Referral. Our Early Learning Center is NAEYC accredited and has 5 stars. We have 6 classrooms and just under 70 children enrolled infants through age 5. We have been a preK partner with our largest SU (Windham Southeast) for over 10 years, and partner with other SUs as needed.

There are 16 preK partners in our largest SU, and 238 children enrolled with those partners. This is down from 18 partners last year and 240 children enrolled, 17 partners in 2016-17 and 283 children enrolled. This decrease in one year (from 283 to 240) occurred because public programs were opened. There are 3 preK programs based in the public schools with 37 children this year in WSESU, with some capacity to expand but not a lot. There are more in the neighboring SUs (WCSU, WSWSU, WNESU) but I do not have that data. The mixed delivery system is vital in our region and important in creating maximum access to public preK.

I believe strongly in public investment in early education and appreciate the efforts towards making it work well in Vermont. In terms of senate bill 10 the I especially appreciate purpose 3 to "simplify and clarify the quality criteria for prekindergarten providers" and think this is largely achieved. I also appreciate the second stated purpose "to centralize the accounting and contracting functions by moving these functions from school districts to the AOE" as an effort towards efficiency, standardization and oversight. My concern is that it is essential to make sure that local relationships between public and private providers continue to be encouraged and supported, and not negatively impacted by the centralization of these functions. I wonder if it is worth identifying specific areas that are expected to be managed in partnership locally, such as sharing professional development, discussing regional data, etc. I assume the intent of the first stated purpose of S.10, to "eliminate the joint administration by the AOE and AHS of prekindergarten programs" is to create efficiency and clarity, which I appreciate. However, I think it will have the opposite effect.

What is most critical for the success of early childhood education, including preK, is partnership and integration both horizontally and vertically. Early education is not 10 hours a week. At these ages everything is education, from preliteracy activities in morning circle to lunch time to

outdoor play, the entirety of the environment supports the continual learning that is happening. Removing oversight of ten hours of PreK from the entity that has primarily been responsible for early learning in the state is not progress, and it should not happen because our systems are struggling to work across agencies. We need structures that help early childhood culture and school culture collaborate in the sandbox. Our existing systems around oversight and accountability of early learning are robust in the state and could be adapted to meet the identified challenges. This would be a more efficient than moving responsibility for what amounts to less than ¼ of the time an eligible child may spend in early learning to an agency that has not had the primary oversight for the early learning system thus far and using existing systems will ultimately decrease duplication of effort. For instance, moving the establishment of safety and quality requirements for public providers to AOE (p. 14 line 7, section 7 of ??) would create a parallel system which is not needed. Rather than creating work by having the Secretary consult with AHS (it perhaps should be more specific), it seems possible to follow the licensing regulations as written and allow for a waiver process for public programs versus moving the oversight of public program wholesale to another agency. It may appear easier in the short-term but creates longer term problems as we continue to strive to create an early childhood system.

If our existing agencies are having a hard time aligning and integrating around early education I recommend that we work on creating structures for supporting successful collaboration rather than reinforcing the silos, and falsely dividing early education by age, location and funding mechanism.