



Date: Tuesday, August 25, 2020

To: Representative Ann Pugh, Chair
House Committee on Human Services
Senator Ginny Lyons, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

From: Aly Richards, CEO, Let's Grow Kids

Re: Limitation on allowable hours for Family Child Care Homes serving school-age children

First, thank you so much to this committee for all the hard work you've done in recent years and during the pandemic to shore up Vermont's child care system and create a more equitable future for all our children. Vermont's stabilization program set a standard for the nation in how to sustain this crucial industry, the Restart Grant funds provided much-needed relief to programs struggling to reopen and stay open in a vastly different landscape, and we are hopeful that the additional \$12 million in Operational Relief Grants will continue to help these struggling programs.

COVID-19 has made even more Vermonters acutely aware of the critical role that child care plays in our society. It has become clear to all that child care is not an economic accessory; it is essential infrastructure for a thriving, equitable society and a strong economy. **As we move quickly together to address the current crisis, we cannot lose sight of the bigger crisis that predates the pandemic.** Let's Grow Kids is committed to making sure that all of our work to respond to this current emergency should adhere to two foundational principles:

- **Sustainability:** as we dive into details of solving short-term problems presented by COVID-19, we must make sure we are also setting a strong foundation for the future of child care in Vermont.
- **Equity:** the equitable child care system that we're all working toward must serve all children and ensure that services are accessible to those most in need, with an eye toward undoing historical oppression.

As we face the next wave of crisis in terms of capacity to provide for school-age children for the hours they are not in schools in the coming weeks, we appreciate your committees' quick attention to an issue that has arisen with regulations related to registered family child care homes. These programs, which are an integral component of the child care system in our rural state, are subject to a regulation that limits their

ability to care for school-age children on days during the school year when they are not in school. These programs are limited to four hours of care per day for kids when they are in school, except for school closing days, snow days, and vacation days. This list needs to be expanded to include remote learning days during this pandemic. **We appreciate that the Governor addressed this in Addendum 4 to the Amended and Restated Executive Order, and we support your committees' efforts to make sure the statute is changed so that it's entirely clear that registered family child care homes can be a part of the solution.** Although this bill is looking at the immediate short term, we also support making this change permanently.

At the same time that we build emergency capacity for school-age children in the coming weeks, we cannot ignore the permanent "state of emergency" that families with young children have been operating in for years, and we cannot lose sight of the continued critical needs of birth to five programs, especially hiring and retaining staff. We know that these committees appreciate the urgency around this larger child care crisis and we look forward to talking more with about this in the coming weeks, especially two major themes we're hearing from the field: workforce supports, especially pay, professional preparation, and access to health insurance; and the immediate, crucial need for an updated IT system at CDD.

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare a stark reality that has plagued our state for decades: child care is inaccessible to over half of Vermont's youngest children. It has exposed the inequities in this fragile system and exacerbated the child care crisis Vermonters were already facing. To support children, families, employers, and our state economy, we must come together to build an equitable and sustainable child care system. **Vermont needs a high-quality child care system that is accessible to all families, universally affordable, and values early childhood educators for their expertise.**