



## **2.13.2019 Building Bright Futures Testimony to Senate Health and Welfare Re: 2018 Vermont Early Care and Learning Household Survey**

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### **BBF as an organization**

- Building Bright Futures was created in statute to:
  - Advise the administration and legislature on early childhood policy
  - Monitor the well-being of VT children and families
  - Convene individuals, organizations, and agencies committed to young children at both the regional and state level, recognizing that we can better meet the diverse needs of all children and families when we work together.
- Our structure
  - Early Childhood State Advisory Council
  - 12 Regional Early Childhood Councils
  - Statewide Early Childhood Action Plan Committees
  - Vermont Insights - early childhood data portal
  - How Are VT's Young Children and Families - annual report and recommendations
- BBF's goals for legislative engagement
  - Be a resource to legislators
  - Provide high level early childhood policy recommendations
  - Help legislators access relevant early childhood data
  - Connecting you to diverse, cross-sector voices and perspectives from our statewide council network
  - We do not advocate for specific legislation as an organization.

### **Reflections on Key Findings of the Survey**

In our efforts to monitor the early childhood system in Vermont and make policy recommendations accordingly, the practices and preferences of Vermont families when it comes to child care have always been somewhat of a blind spot. We have relied primarily on anecdotal or proxy data. These findings begin to shed light on some key questions that have emerged repeatedly from early childhood stakeholders as we work to strengthen our early care and learning system.

- **What is the demand for child care?**

In recent years we have been using census data on the percent of Vermont children with all parents in the workforce as a proxy for demand, defining these as children likely to need care. This percent has hovered around 70% of children five and under.

This survey provides additional information, by highlighting that closer to 80% of households have all parents working, and that of those, almost all use some kind of child care. But it also shows that of the 20% of families who have at least one parent not working, still almost half use some kind of child care. This suggests that demand is high in Vermont across different types of families.

- **What kind of child care programs do parents/families want?**

Vermont has remained committed to a mixed-delivery system in our child care policy. Our child care system includes center-based programs like public PreK, Head Start, and private child care centers, as well as registered home-based child care programs. We also allow for more informal paid and unpaid care from relatives and friends.

This survey reflects that families see strengths in all these forms of care. It is notable that all three types of care are seen as nurturing. Center-based care is seen as strongest for education and socialization, but lacks affordability and flexibility. Friend or relative care is seen as the most affordable, flexible, and nurturing, and family child care homes show up somewhere in the middle.

- **Which families are most in need of support when it comes to child care?**

There has been a sense in the early childhood community that Vermont does an ok job at supporting our lowest-income families with child care, but that more support is needed for working families.

This survey suggests that, in addition to supporting working families who are struggling, we may have even more to do to support our lowest income families. 41% of families living at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level rely on some kind of unpaid care compare to about one quarter of those with higher incomes. When they do pay for care, these families pay a significantly higher percentage of their income on child care costs.

- **What impact does access to child care have on our workforce and economy?**

Early childhood stakeholders and advocates have been sharing anecdotal stories about the choices Vermont families are having to make between work and child care and the impact this has on our state's workforce.

The survey suggests a strong relationships between child care and work, with the majority of households stating that the availability of child care affects how much parents work. As the state seeks to grow our workforce, availability of child care is clearly a key consideration.