

My name is Laura Hardie, I'm a 7th generation Vermonter raising my 2 kids (ages 2 and 4) in Waterbury with my husband. I've become interested in improving childcare in Vermont because it is one of my life goals to be an authentic, open and imperfect leader in my community. I believe that civic duty and giving back to our communities is an honor and an opportunity to make the places we live a better one.

And that's why I want to thank you. Because you're doing that day in and day out.

You've improved the mental health and well-being of my kids by supporting child care. I am lucky though, because my family can afford it. Today, I ask to please support the Governor's proposed investments in child care.

In 2019, my family paid close to 15% of our annual income on child care, approximately \$22,500 for two kids. I am lucky though, because we could afford it. I strongly believe the high-quality experience, services, and teachers at Hunger Mountain Children's Center are worth it and should be greater than what we pay them, but your average Vermont family can't afford to pay any more.

In June when childcare centers across the state re-opened, I left the parking lot of Hunger Mountain Children's Center crying. Why? Because I had just dropped off my kids for the first time in 3 months and they were OVERJOYED to return after a long quarantine. I almost didn't even get a hug goodbye. I left in tears because I knew how much this place meant to them and us, how happy they were, and the quality care they were receiving. My kids come home every day covered in paint, glitter and smiles. The socialization and education they get at Hunger Mountain was something I could not give them at home. My husband and I have been able to return to work fulltime since June 2019 - another HUGE benefit.

I recently joined the board at Hunger Mountain and I've had visibility into how big of a difference the COVID relief funding made in their ability to re-open. Thank you for this crucial investment. Now, how do we help parents afford what you've worked to keep open and available?

Please do everything you can to support the Governor's proposed investments in child care, so more families can afford it.

Thank you so much for your efforts on behalf of parents and early educators during the pandemic. I'm appreciative of all your hard work.