



February 23, 2021

Dear Chair Pugh and the House Committee on Human Services,

Thank you to your committee and the legislature writ large for all that you have done to support Vermonters throughout this pandemic. We appreciate your comprehensive and thoughtful approach in finding solutions that work to ensure that all Vermonters have what they need to get through this difficult time.

Main Street Alliance of Vermont (MSA-VT) is a non-profit organization that elevates the voices of small business owners on important public policy issues in Vermont such as paid family and medical leave, child care, voting, and equitable access to economic recovery through COVID-19. Our membership of business owners are focused on strategies that target support not only for their businesses but for their employees because they know that the health and welfare of our workers and families only strengthens the economic viability of our small business economy. MSA-VT remains committed to working on these issues through the lens of equity, with racial, social and economic justice at the center.

Main Street Alliance of Vermont strongly supports Let's Grow Kids' three-year Child Care is Essential Campaign and H.171. The pandemic has shown us the outsized impact child care has on our economy and on Vermont women in the workforce. At its peak, women made up 73% of our state unemployment rate. Decades of progress towards gender equity have been undone, practically overnight.

"Access to affordable childcare is the foundation of equity in our community, state, and nation. It allows people of all races, genders, and soci-economic levels to participate fully in the workforce and society" Ricky and Kelly Klein - MSA-VT Board member and co-owner of Groennfell Meadery - St. Albans

Our members know that in order to have a thriving economy, we have to build a strong and sustainable child care system. In a recent survey issued by Main Street Alliance of Vermont and VBSR, 42.7% of business owners indicated that lack of child care is a challenge for their employees' ability to return to work. Without increased investment, our members' valued employees will not have the critical child care that they need in order to return to work. As we grapple with our state's shrinking demographics, the investment in child care infrastructure proposed in H.171 will help to further attract and retain young working families to Vermont. We must take this opportunity to champion bold solutions that develop a sustainable child care infrastructure so that all families have access to affordable and high quality child care and our valued early-childhood educators receive sustainable and equitable compensation.

"As a sole-proprietor and parent of young children, if I don't have affordable childcare, I cannot run my business. Vermont is full of vibrant sole-proprietorships run by parents who value the flexibility and challenge of running their own business. We need to encourage creativity and innovation in our communities by making it easy for entrepreneurs to have access to childcare while they build and run their businesses. I imagine a future where Vermont supports a vibrant fabric of business owners with the tools they need to thrive, including high-quality and affordable childcare."
Julia Rogers - MSA-VT Board Member and Owner of EnRoute Gap Year Consulting - Stowe

Additionally, in order to ensure that this program works for all Vermont's businesses, we must include broad representation on the Early Care and Education Governance and Administration Advisory Committee. Main Street Alliance of Vermont supports the following draft language to add to Section 14 of the bill as put forward by Let's Grow Kids:

(16)Three representatives of businesses. These three members shall represent one small, one medium, and one large business.

And adding language to say: Building Bright Futures shall consult with the Vermont Business Roundtable, Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility, Main Street Alliance of Vermont, and the Vermont Chamber of Commerce in selecting business representatives.

Again, we thank you for all that you and your committee do to support Vermonters and thank you for your time and consideration. MSA-VT strongly supports H.171 and is available to your committee, should you have any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

Morgan Nichols
State Director
Main Street Alliance of Vermont

Main Street Alliance of Vermont Advisory Board:

- Randy George - Chair - Red Hen Baking Co
- Lindsay Deslauriers - Vice-Chair - Bolton Valley Ski Resort
- Melinda Moulton - Main Street Landing
- Eric Sorkin - Runamok Maple
- Julia Rogers - EnRoute Gap Year Consulting
- Ricky Klein - Groennfell Meadery
- Eliza Cain - Red Hen Baking Co
- Matt Birong - Three Squares Cafe
- Sivan Cotel - Formerly of Stonecutter Spirits