



To: House Appropriations Committee, Representative Mary Hooper, Chair

From: Janet McLaughlin, Executive Director

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Date: January 6, 2022

Re: Budget Adjustment Act and the Early Childhood Education Workforce

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. The Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children (VTAIEYC) is the state's largest professional organization of early childhood educators and their allies with a mission to advance equity and excellence in early childhood education. I am here today on behalf of our 500 members to thank you for your actions over the past two years to bolster early childhood education programs in Vermont, and to reaffirm for you that in spite of that support, we continue to have a severe crisis in early childhood education staffing in Vermont that grows worse by the day. In a recent survey of early childhood education programs in Vermont conducted by our national parent organization, 71% of center-based programs reported experiencing a staffing shortage ([NAEYC](#)). We firmly believe that immediate action is needed to stave off a widespread reduction in child care capacity by investing one-time funds in initiatives to recruit and retain early childhood educators.

Specifically, we recommend that you allocate federal or state one-time funds in the Budget Adjustment Act to support the early childhood education workforce by:

- **Provide no-cost child care for the children of early childhood educators working in regulated programs** by extending CCFAP eligibility and benefits to provide 100% financial assistance to the children of early childhood educators. The Child Development Division might be able to provide a cost estimate for this initiative.
- **Issuing retention bonuses for early childhood educators:** We know that these essential workers are among the lowest-paid employees in the state, in spite of their skills, expertise, and value to our families, communities, and economy. Similar to the child care workforce stabilization program that you funded in December of 2019, funding should be provided to issue retention bonuses for each person working in child care, plus additional bonuses for every vacant position that programs can use as a hiring bonus. Three payments in 2022, of \$1000 to everyone working in child care programs in Vermont, would provide crucial relief and would cost approximately \$19 million.
- **Ensuring all early childhood educators working in Vermont have access to health insurance:** Many early childhood educators do not have access to employer-sponsored health insurance and are not well-versed in health insurance options available to them through Vermont Health Connect.

- **Dedicated Navigator Support:** To address the disconnect and ensure that early childhood educators—who are working in close contact with young, unvaccinated children—have access to health insurance, we propose that Vermont Health Connect designate health insurance navigators to assist early childhood educators with enrollment.
- **Offer health care premium assistance:** Affording health care can be a burden for many early childhood educators who are still on the frontlines of potential exposure to COVID-19 during the pandemic. Funding should be allocated to ensure that early childhood educators working in regulated child care programs who meet certain income and work criteria are able to access affordable health insurance. This strategy has proved useful in other states. We estimate that premium assistance of \$200 per month for those working in child care would cost approximately \$11 million.
- **Expanding Vermont’s student loan repayment support program** for new early childhood educators to cover all who have graduated with early childhood-related degrees within the past 20 years to be eligible for the program. We estimate this would cost approximately \$5.7 million.

We believe that these investments should not wait for the FY23 budget process – families and early childhood educators, and child care programs are struggling right now, and July may be too late. Please prioritize this funding in the Budget Adjustment Act. Again, thank you for your support of this critical sector of the workforce.