



To: Senate and House Appropriations Committees, Chair Kitchel and Chair Hooper

From: Janet McLaughlin, Executive Director

Vermont Association for the Education of Young Children

Date: February 9, 2022

Re: SFY23 budget 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 (VTAEYC) 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 we need both immediate action to ensure that early childhood education survives the present moment and long-term strategic investments that create the early childhood education system envisioned in Act 45 last year. Early childhood educators are central to that vision and compensation that values them for their skilled work is essential. Right now, they are among the lowest-paid employees in the state, in spite of their skills, expertise, and value to our families, communities, and economy.

First, in order to retain current early childhood educators and recruit new early educators to the field, Vermont should make immediate investments in compensation for early childhood educators that allows talented early childhood educators to remain in the field. We hear from VTAEYC members and others in the field that educators are leaving work they love - or not finding their way to early childhood education at all - because they simply can't afford to pay their bills. At a time when the labor market is increasingly tight, Vermont should do more for this foundational workforce. In addition to support for programs that will allow them to increase regular compensation and offer retention bonuses, Vermont has the ability to address three of the most common reasons people leave the field: health insurance, student loans, and - ironically - child care costs. Vermont should:

- Offer premium assistance to ensure all early childhood educators working in Vermont have access to health insurance and health services they can afford.

- Expand the student loan repayment assistance program currently in development to early childhood educators who earned degrees in the last 20 years.
- 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.

Second, Vermont must create a robust workforce development strategy for Early Childhood Education as the state has done for other fields central to Vermont's economy. VTAEYC is ready to partner with the state to embed early childhood education recruitment into all state workforce development programs and to establish a coordinated, resourced recruitment campaign that attracts talented educators and caregivers into the field.

Early childhood educators have been stepping up during the COVID-19 pandemic - and for decades before that - to care for Vermont's children and families, despite exceptionally low pay and a lack of resources to meet families' increasingly complex needs. What we're seeing now - an acute workforce shortage during a tight labor market - is the predictable and painful result. And it's negatively impacting kids, families, educators, communities, employers and the economy. Please prioritize investments in Vermont's early childhood educators.