

Otter Creek Child Center

"Celebrating 35 years of helping children discover their love for learning"

Date: February 8, 2022

To: Vermont House and Senate Appropriations Committees

From: Linda January, Executive Director of Otter Creek Child Center

Re: Governor's FY23 Recommended State Budget- Public Hearing

Hello. Thank you for your time. I am Linda January, resident of Bridport and Executive Director of Otter Creek Child Center in Middlebury. I'm here to talk about the vital field of early childhood education and the critical investments needed to continue to support Vermont families, businesses, and Vermont's essential early childhood workforce.

Thank you for your work last year to pass H.171/Act 45, which put in motion a historic public commitment to achieving an affordable, accessible, equitable, high-quality early childhood education system. Act 45 was the first step in achieving this and it gave great hope to those of us working in this field.

If the pandemic has done nothing else, it has shown Vermont, the country, the world, how incredibly valuable early childhood education services are to the larger society. How vital the work of early childhood educators is to the wellbeing of families, children, and the economy. When COVID-19 shut down the world in March 2020, within less than a week it was clear that in order to have critical occupations open and working, in order to have doctors and nurses on the frontlines, we had to have childcare. And swiftly and nimbly childcare opened when the rest of the world was still closed.

And yet, despite this acknowledgement that our society as a whole cannot function properly without childcare, we are still struggling. The workforce is shrinking, programs are closing, and families are struggling to access and afford childcare like never before.

Tonight I ask you to continue your commitment to early childhood education by supporting the Governor's proposed increase to the Child Care Financial Assistance Program.

I also ask that you think creatively about how Vermont can support the early childhood work force now, to ensure that we stop losing and start adding to this critical workforce. Please support strategies like:

- Providing no-cost child care for early childhood educators
- Helping early childhood educators access and afford health insurance
- Helping reduce student loan debt
- Focusing on recruiting new early childhood educators to the field

Thank you again for holding these hearings and allowing the people of Vermont to be heard. I look forward to the amazing, transformational work that will happen this legislative session and next to make Vermont a national leader in transforming the critical field of early childhood education.