

Questions for witnesses for H.171 – answers submitted by Alyson Grzyb,
Director of Bennington Early Childhood Center

1. Academic research says that advanced degrees are very important in childcare.

What has been your practical experience?

I absolutely believe that advanced degrees are important for providing informed, high quality care and education. In my Center, as well as at Head Start Programs and public school pre-k programs, it is already a requirement for lead teachers to have a Bachelor's degree. In my ideal world this would be the case in all programs, but I recognize that it is very hard to recruit educated people to this field when pay and benefits are so severely lacking. There are also some people currently working in this field who do not have advanced degrees and are naturally great teachers, but it is my experience that advanced degrees make us even better teachers. I have a teacher that I hired about 5 years ago. She had a bachelor's degree in a different field, but a great passion for working with young children. She has since gone back to graduate school and is almost done with her Master's degree in ECE. She was always a good teacher, but I witnessed enormous growth in her quality of teaching since taking those advanced level classes. Our greatest hurdle is losing folks once they have their teaching licenses to the public school system that is able to pay significantly more for the same work.

2. Do you accept families who utilize the state's childcare assistance? Yes
Do you cap or have a limit on the number of children from those families that your program is able to take? No

Would changes in H.171 that expand the Childcare Financial Assistance Program (CCFAP) to lower income and middle-income families improve access to your childcare program?

Yes, this would make a huge difference! Currently families that only qualify for partial subsidy or just miss the cutoff for receiving any subsidy are really struggling to pay their tuition. To alleviate their financial burden some families are cutting back their hours at childcare so that their tuition bill is less, even though they may really need those hours. A couple of my families who are struggling have resorted to relying on the grandparents to fill the financial gap. One parent said to me that she feels like every time she does something to better her life, like accepting a promotion at work, ends up hurting her

more financially. An expansion of CCFAP, both in how many families are being reached and the depth of that assistance, would significantly assist a great many families.

3. What would the impact of being paid based on enrollment versus attendance have on your program?

When a regularly paying family goes on vacation for a week or a child is out sick for a week we still get paid for their slot. This same thing should happen for CCFAP families. It could have a significant positive effect on programs, especially those with a high number of CCFAP families.

4. When you submit your program's information to the State for the market rate survey, what do you submit and how do you come up with the figure?

We submit our maximum tuition rate for our open hours, 7:30-5:00 Monday-Friday, but this does not truly cover the cost of care. We know that most parents cannot afford to pay more, but the actual cost of care (especially if we were to pay our staff what they are actually worth) is more than what we charge.

5. If your program takes children ages 0-3, what does a typical day look like?

We do serve children under the age of 3. A typical day would include free play/exploration, diapers, breakfast, gathering/circle time, outside play, indoor play, diapers, lunch, nap, diapers, snack, and more outside play.

6. What do you think about the concept of the State setting the lowest amount you would be allowed to pay an employee of your program?

Early Childhood Educators definitely need to be paid more than they currently are, especially those with education under their belts. If CCFAP rates increase significantly then this may be able to become a reality. It could be helpful to have benchmarks for those who do have various levels of training. For example, those with AA degrees should not make less than _____, those with BA degrees should not make less than _____, and those with MA degrees and/or teaching licenses should not make less than _____).

7. As a provider, someone who is doing the work:

a) please identify one thing that the state could do to improve your interaction with them and support your business and the children;

Updates to the Bright Futures Information System (BFIS) would be huge, especially if those updates helped to make the system easier to navigate.

b) what is one thing the state should stop doing and

The State should stop making bandaid fixes. We need systemic change that acknowledges that the work we are doing is both valued and supported.

c) what is one thing the state should keep doing

Communication is key. The more the workforce feels as though it is being kept in the loop and listened to the better.